

SPIRITAN *LIFE* *VIE* SPIRITAINE



VIDA ESPIRITANA

Cover / Capa / Couverture:

O Pano Quaresmal latino-americano de Misereor

O Ressuscitado acompanha o povo de Deus no seu caminho.

Adolfo Pérez Esquivel (Argentina)

Prémio Nobel da Paz em 1980

SPIRITAN LIFE

"The Spirit of the Risen Lord,
working in the Church and in the world,
gives life and direction to our entire apostolic life."

S.R.L. 8

VIDA ESPIRITANA

"O Espírito de Cristo ressuscitado,
actuando na Igreja e no mundo,
anima e guida toda a nossa vida apostólica."

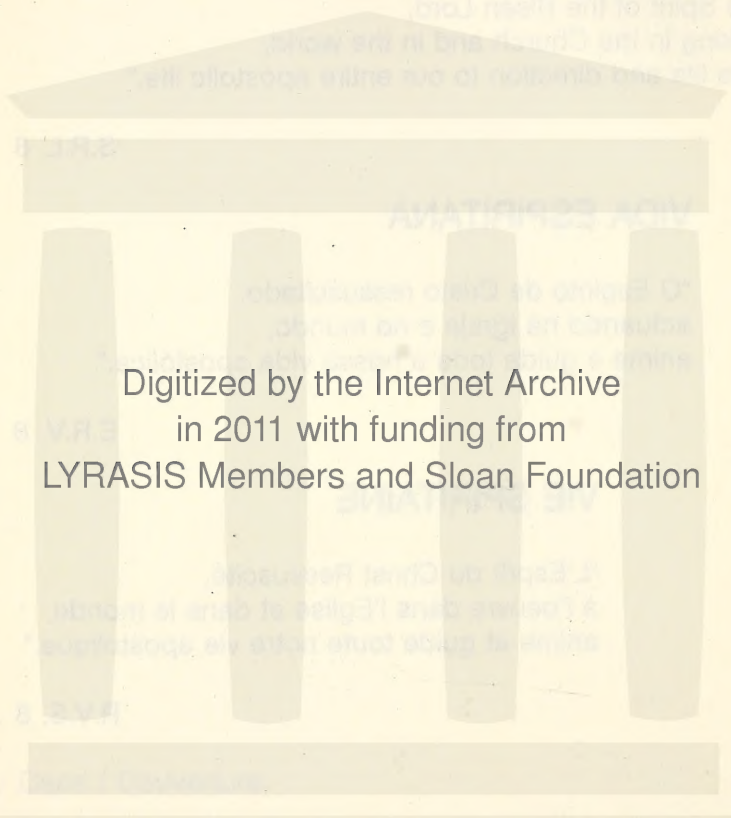
E.R.V. 8

VIE SPIRITAINE

"L'Esprit du Christ Ressuscité,
à l'oeuvre dans l'Eglise et dans le monde,
anime et guide toute notre vie apostolique."

R.V.S. 8

JUIN 1994, No 6



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Editorial

The Spiritan family, which lives in some fifty countries, has to maintain its "unity in diversity". At Itaici the delegates asked the General Council to provide an inspiration for Mission "which would be more of a spirituality than a strategy" (It.1992 33.2.1).

From spiritual inspiration come significant experiences. Inspiration is the wellspring of actions and words that are prophetic. The prophet may be seen as "the householder who brings out of his storeroom new things as well as old" (Mk 13:52)

The new is the vocation of Africans (see James Okoye's article) along with the integration of our students into the Spiritan traditions (São Paulo and Clamart, Paris). The new is also the situations of conflict that many of us are living in to-day - R.Gonnet and I.Nzemba in Algeria and E.Jacquot in Haiti. The new is where we stand and what we are doing for greater justice and peace for people oppressed and underprivileged (J.Skinnader). The new is the renewal of missionary institutes following Vatican II and the setting up in Rome by their superiors of Sedos (W. Jenkinson).

The new is when you first discover what might be thought ancient. Our mission is an educational service (H. Koren). We fulfil it by setting ourselves "in keeping with the spirit of our Founders, our living tradition and the present needs of the world" (SRL 100).

The following of Christ commits us to change. Libermann leaves Rennes at the ending of a spiritual struggle (A. Collins), and sets to his future mission.

His apostolic maturity is shown by his activities during 1846. He goes away from Amiens for five months, confident of his confreres' ability to manage the enterprise. He goes visiting bishops and directors of major seminaries to tell them about the needs of mission in Africa. In Rome he writes the text that is the foundation of our whole inheritance - the Memoir of 1846 (J-C. Pariat). Mary is present in the very trunk of the tree that is the Congregation (P. Iwashita).

To some extent, what is new draws life and finds meaning in what is old. It is from what memory holds that prophesy springs. To draw new confidence from the living traditions of the Congregation is to make a generous contribution to the renewal of missionary service.

Jean-Claude Pariat

Editorial

A nossa Família espiritana, presente em meia centena de países, deve manter a sua 'unidade na diversidade'. Os delegados ao Capítulo de Itaici pediram ao Conselho Geral "orientações claras acerca da 'Missão', a qual deve ser vista 'mais como espiritualidade do que como estratégia'" (Itaici, 33, 2.1).

A inspiração espiritual é a origem de experiências significativas, de palavras e de gestos proféticos. Podemos comparar o profeta a 'um pai de família que tira da sua despesa coisas novas e coisas velhas' (Mat. 13, 52).

As 'coisas novas' são as vocações africanas (artigo de James Okoye) e a integração dos nossos estudantes na tradição espiritana (São Paulo e Clamart). As 'coisas novas' são as situações de conflito em que vivem muitos de nossos confrades, por exemplo no Haiti (E. Jacquot) ou na Argélia (R. Gonnet e I. Nzemba). As 'coisas novas' são a nossa presença e a nossa atividade em favor da Justiça&Paz junto aos oprimidos e desfavorecidos da sorte (J. Skinnader). As 'coisas novas' é a renovação dos Institutos missionários na linha do Vaticano II. Seus responsáveis criaram um ambiente de reflexão e de aprofundamento em Roma: o 'Sedos' (W. Jenkinson).

As 'coisas novas' é descobrir pela primeira vez o que pode ser considerado como 'coisas velhas'. A nossa missão é um serviço educativo (H. Koren); nós o realizamos "escutando os nosso Fundadores, a nossa tradição viva e as necessidades do mundo atual" (RVE. 100).

Seguir o Cristo exige de nós a mudança. No final de um difícil combate espiritual, Libermann deixa Rennes, (A. Collins) e inicia a sua futura missão. As suas atividades, em 1848, nos revelam a sua maturidade apostólica. Deixa Amiens durante cinco meses, confiando a seus confrades a direção da Obra. Visita e informa os Bispos e os responsáveis de seminários Maiores acerca das necessidades da Missão na África. Em Roma, escreveu um dos textos-chave da nossa herança: o memorial de 1846, (J-C. Pariat). "No tronco principal da árvore da Congregação" vislumbramos a presença de Maria, (P. Iwashita).

As 'coisas novas' encontram uma parte de sua vida e de seu sentido nas 'coisas velhas'. Das memórias surgirá a profecia. Sentir confiança na tradição viva da Congregação é contribuir largamente para a renovação do serviço missionário.

Jean-Claude Pariat.

Editorial

Présente dans une cinquantaine de pays, notre famille spiritaine doit "maintenir son unité dans la diversité". Les délégués à Itaici ont demandé au Conseil Général une inspiration en vue d'un Mission qui soit "davantage spiritualité que stratégie". (Itaici no 33, 2.1).

L'inspiration spirituelle est la source d'expériences significantes; elle est la source de paroles et d'actes prophétiques. Les prophètes sont semblables "à un propriétaire qui tire de son trésor du neuf et du vieux" (Mt 13,52).

Le neuf, ce sont les vocations africaines (J. Okoye) et l'intégration de nos étudiants dans la tradition spiritaine (São Paulo et Clamart). Le neuf, ce sont les situations conflictuelles dans lesquelles beaucoup d'entre nous vivent aujourd'hui comme en Haïti (E. Jacquot) ou en Algérie (R. Gonnet et I. Nzemba). Le neuf, c'est notre présence et notre action pour plus de justice et de paix auprès des opprimés et des défavorisés (J. Skinnader). Le neuf, c'est le renouveau des Instituts missionnaires après Vatican II. Leurs responsables ont créé un lieu de réflexion et d'approfondissement à Rome: le Sedos (W.

Jenkinson).

Le neuf, c'est découvrir pour la première fois ce qui peut être considéré comme ancien. Notre mission est un service éducatif (H. Koren); nous l'accomplissons en nous mettant "à l'écoute de nos fondateurs, de notre tradition vivante et des besoins du monde actuel" (RVS 100).

Suivre le Christ nous engage au changement. Au terme d'un difficile combat spirituel, Libermann quitte Rennes, (A. Collins). Il s'initie à sa future mission. Ses activités, en 1846, nous révèlent sa maturité apostolique. Il quitte Amiens pendant cinq mois en donnant sa confiance à ses confrères pour la direction de l'oeuvre. Il visite et informe des évêques et des responsables de Grand séminaires sur les besoins de la Mission en Afrique. A Rome, il écrit un des textes-fondateurs de notre héritage: le mémoire de 1846, (J-C. Pariat). "Dans le tronc principal de l'arbre de la Congrégation", il y a la présence de Marie, (P. Iwashita).

Le nouveau trouve une part de sa vie et de son sens dans l'ancien. De la mémoire doit jaillir la prophétie. Retrouver confiance en la tradition vivante de la Congrégation, c'est contribuer largement au renouveau du service missionnaire.

Jean-Claude Pariat

VOCATIONS AMONG THE IGBO OF NIGERIA

by Chukwuma James Okoye

Fr. Okoye is presently a member of the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops in Rome. Spiritan from Nigeria, he was ordained on 18 April 1970. He worked as diocesan and Bishops Secretary at Enugu before leaving for studies in 1972. An Oxford M.A. (classical hebrew), he took the licence in Sacred Scripture at the Biblicum (Rome) and the doctorate in Oxford with a thesis on the Palestinian Targums. Back home in 1980, he was briefly assigned to the Catholic Institute of West Africa, Port Harcourt, before as Provincial Superior and later General Assistant.

Introduction ¹

In view of the Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops, questions are being asked in certain quarters concerning the genuineness of the "explosion" of vocations in parts of Africa. The "Working Document" of the synod treated this matter briefly in no. 28. Many Episcopal Conferences in their answers showed some concern about the solidity of African vocations and the possibility that human and social motivations may be found mixed with religious and divine ones. The document, however, rejected the charge that these were largely "social vocations", that is, undertaken in view of social promotion.

¹ Adapted from the Italian original, Chukwuma James Okoye, "Pastorale vocazionale tra gli Igbo della Nigeria," *Rogate Ergo*, Anno LVI, no 10 (ottobre 1993) 46-49.

Rather it asserts that "the current abundance of vocations in Africa (is) a grace of God to be welcomed with joy and gratitude". Greater care is nevertheless, to be taken in discerning motivations, and greater precision in the mind of the particular Church concerning the profile of the priest and the consecrated person within the cultural milieu. The hoped-for result is that cultural and Christian values will reinforce each other, leading to joyful vocations rooted in the cultural ambience. This article seeks to examine a particular case, that of the Igbo vocations, to discern to what extent the interplay of Christian and cultural elements promote or hinder authentic vocation.

Vocations in the Church

The Church is a "mysterium vocationis" (a mystery of vocation)", for as **ecclesia** (church) she is 'a convocation', an assembly of those who have been called".² "Vocation, in a certain sense, defines the very being of the Church, even before her activity" (ibid.). Hence in her mission to care for the birth, discernment and fostering of vocations, the Church fulfills a task which is both connatural to her and essential to her very nature (ibid.).

Vocation is a dialogue between "two persons who address each other", "an unending and mutual interplay of question and answer which call forth and explain each other".³ God's call is usually not a sudden event but a slow process: a person gradually discovers this call as he becomes better aware of the deepest yearnings of his being and the direction to which these point.

² John Paul II, *Pastores dabo vobis*, no. 34

³ P. Grieger, "i giovani di oggi alla crocevia della vita; la problematica dell'opzione personale", *Vita Consacrata*, 1979, p. 402.

"The Father calls, the Son sends and the Holy Spirit consecrates".⁴ Vocation is thus a trinitarian dialogue with the person called. A genuine vocation is at the same time fidelity to one's inner self and response to the pull of God's grace, a "being sent" by another and a personal choice of a state of life. One chooses this state because, feeling oneself deeply drawn to it by the impulse of the Holy Spirit, one sees the state as offering a life project which promises best to integrate and express all one's energies.

Vocations in Igboland

Today it is customary to distinguish between vocation and vocations in the Church. All the baptized have a Christian vocation, they are called to the plenitude of holiness. Among the baptized, there are various vocations. Some are called in a special way to consecrate this world and the entire creation to God, others are called to a special dedication to the service of God and of humanity. In the rest of this article, "vocation" will be understood in this latter and restricted sense.

The gospel was first brought to the Igbo of South East Nigeria only in the 1850's. The Protestants were the first to arrive, Catholic missionaries (of the Congregation of the Holy Ghost) arriving in December 1885. The March 1992 Census avoided the question of ethnic belonging. Nevertheless, the four Igbo States East of the River Niger numbered 10.7 million. There could be a further 1 million Igbos numbered under Rivers State. Igbos West of the Niger could number 2 million, and those living in places all over the country could be more than 4 million. In all, one reckons with about 18 million Igbos. It has been among the Igbo of the East that the Church has known

⁴ *Developments of Pastoral Care for Vocations in the Local Churches: Experiences of the Past and Programmes for the Future.* The Conclusive Document., Rome, 1982, no. 13.

phenomenal growth. About 50% of the population would be Catholics, 30% Protestants and members of the African Independent Churches, and the remaining 20% would be followers of the African Traditional Religion (henceforth, ATR). Some areas of Igboland register a very high percentage of Catholics, for example, Mbaise (Imo State) where the percentage could be as high as 90% and where there is a veritable "explosion" of vocations. Some families already have given two or three sons/daughters to the Church.

Yet the first ordination of an Igbo to the priesthood was as recent as 8 December 1930. From very slow beginnings, the years after the Civil War (1970+) began to see large numbers for ordination. There are now more than 1500 Igbo priests (diocesan and religious) and over 2000 major seminarians. There used to be one regional seminary, the Bigard Memorial Seminary in Enugu. In recent times it has had to be split into three seminaries, each with a student population, in philosophy and theology, of 528, 525, 566, numbers which are still too large for the necessarily personalized formation.

It is not only the priestly vocation which has grown, but religious vocations too. There are many Igbo religious and other consecrated persons (men and women) in many international institutes. The Spiritan Province of Nigeria already has over 300 professed (among whom over 150 priests) and is now the third largest Province in the Holy Ghost Congregation. There are at least eight indigenous institutes of active life for women, two secular institutes for women, one institute of Brothers, seven contemplative foundations (four of women and three of men). The Congregation of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Mother of God, was founded only in 1937 but it already counts over 600 professed and 150 in formation. The members are missionaries in about ten countries, including Italy, in addition to working in all parts of Nigeria itself. A Spiritan priest founded a Congregation of Sisters only eight years ago. That

Congregation now has over 36 professed and more than 80 in various stages of formation. A veritable harvest of vocations, but how explain it?

The Care of Vocations

It would first be necessary to put things into proper perspective. As far as vocations to the priesthood are concerned, it should be noted that ordinations have yet to keep pace with the rate of growth of the Christian assembly. The rate of priest to baptized in Africa is still 1 to 4000, when it is only 1 to 1000 in Europe. The "explosion" is not just a Catholic phenomenon; the Protestant and Independent Churches are also experiencing the same. Almost each day a new "Church" springs up around someone who feels he is acting in response to a call from God who has equipped him for such ministry. Hence the full explanation would have to take in the entire social and religious reality.

On the Catholic side, there are many organized efforts to promote vocations. Each diocese and institute of consecrated life seeks to establish a Vocation Movement to promote and foster vocations. Each year a Vocation Week is held during which all the Directors/trices of Vocation *together* visit the parishes and the schools, thus giving the people an idea of the variety of calls within the ministry and the consecrated life. Within this week a "vocational exposition" is held. Most dioceses and every institute of consecrated life invite youth who think they feel a call to carefully structured "vocational weekends" in the community or in diocesan centres.

Africans love associations and fraternities. The mothers of priests and consecrated persons have their own association, and sometimes their own uniform for special occasions, for example during ordinations and professions. In some dioceses, they receive gifts (mostly items of clothing) from the Christian

Mothers, on Mothers' Day or at Christmas time. It is clear that all this can be a great moral support for vocations, even if it can also exert undue pressure on a son or daughter who would wish to leave or indeed ought to choose some other vocation.

The liturgy itself appears as the most effective means of fostering vocations. Ordinations and professions are always a social event, celebrated in the cathedral or in the parish church of the candidate with the massive involvement of the entire populace. The liturgy has the power to speak to the heart of youth who see their peers thus consecrated to the service of God.

Above all, it is to be remembered that vocation is an ecclesial reality; like most things in the Church it too often comes through mediations. A Spiritan Provincial once wrote: ***"Our experience in recent years has made us deeply aware that all the candidates coming for admission to vowed membership in the congregation do so almost without exception because of personal contact with a Spiritan. Of all the candidates who entered the postulate at Hambly only one came in answer to an advertisement in the Catholic press"***.⁵

Igbo priests and consecrated persons are close to the people. Their vocation and living of it becomes a continual question to youth, an interpellation which is reinforced by the strong bonds in the culture between peers and between people who are related in any way.

In the last analysis, vocation, as a reality connatural to the Church, cannot be lacking where there is a truly dynamic

⁵ Sean Byron, ***"Letter to Spiritans of Trans-Canada"***, 7 September 1988.

Christian life. Generosity is a mark of youth. Youth cannot be insensitive to the many needs of a young Church. The younger Churches are often the ones to demonstrate great vitality and joy in the Lord. The Christian family is a hearth of vocations: vocations grow naturally in families where the gift of faith is appreciated and celebrated. Hence we cannot accept the pessimism of those who say that genuine vocations cannot be expected until the fifth or sixth generation of Christians, at the least. For the grace of God is never young: it contains in it all the force necessary to draw souls no matter the age of evangelisation in a place. If at the very dawn of Christianity in Uganda God's grace was given to martyrs to testify with their blood, much more will this grace be available for the total gift of self in an ecclesial vocation. And indeed there are many examples of outstanding graces of vocation. Father X was the only son of a widow. When he was a minor seminarian, the Rector of the seminary could not believe that the mother would let him go. He went to ask the mother who said: "am I God? He who gives life can also ask what he wills!". Vocation is the fruit of living faith.

Still how explain it all?

How explain this "explosion" of vocations and why particularly the Igbo? It should be noted that, though at the moment the Igbo seem exceptional in Nigeria from the point of view of vocations, the same thing is happening among certain peoples in other countries, for example, the Chagga in Tanzania and various peoples in Uganda and Burundi, to mention a few.

Some cynical persons speak openly of "social vocations", that is, of vocations whose origin can be traced to the difficult economic conditions and the social status which comes with ordination or profession. On a visit somewhere, the author was confronted by a former missionary in Africa who stated categorically that most of the vocations in Africa derive from the

social conditions. It cannot be denied that there may be an admixture of motives, human and divine, social and religious, in the case of African vocations, but where isn't this the case? We humans seem to be always wheat and cockle, God himself slowly and painfully tending the wheat and drawing it from the cockle. Our human motivations always want to come in-between us and the impulses of the Holy Spirit, but the Spirit is powerful enough to slowly clean off the dross. It therefore seems to me gross injustice to write off African vocations as inauthentic, prompted more by human promotion than by the impulses of the Holy Spirit. The truth is that at the moment the selection is from among the most gifted, those with basic qualifications for the university. We are even getting applications from persons who have finished their university degrees. There is a real danger that vocation may become elitist, and this must be watched. Minor seminaries and juniorates are becoming schools for the well-to-do who alone can afford the fees, and who want for their children the better formation which schools taken over by the government no longer afford.

Beyond that one meets with remarkable case histories. Father Y was a civil servant and was already engaged to a girl before he gave up all. Sister M. was already a medical doctor before she heard the call. Such case histories are not uncommon. So it certainly is not hunger or the lack of opportunities which explains Igbo vocations.

Some vocation watchers attribute the growth to the influence of the Civil War (1967 till January 1970). It was supposed to have shown up the fragility of human life and aspirations and the passing nature of the values of this world. A similar "explosion" was experienced in Europe after the Second World War. However, the Civil War is already over twenty years behind us, yet the phenomenon gives no indications of abating.

Father Casimir Eke who was Rector of a minor seminary draws attention to the impact of minor seminaries and junior scholasticates.⁶ It is true that in the period 1960 to 1985 the majority of vocations came from these institutions. Recently, however, they are coming equally from outside.

The rate of birth is a factor which cannot be overlooked. There are still an average of six children to each family. Where the rate of birth diminishes, vocations diminish also.

Sidbé Sempore⁷ draws attention to three factors: the desire for a "more" and a "better" in the gift of self; the idea that a consecrated person is nearer to God; and the "seduction" of evangelical chastity. Let us consider the first, which is the desire for a "more". Youth is generous and loves challenges. It cannot but feel itself challenged by the multifarious needs of a young Church. Someone put up this advertisement:

"Help wanted. Volunteers willing to sell all they own and give proceeds to the poor, quit their job for full time assignment, and leave home to work in other countries. Must be willing to postpone rewards until later. Possible loss of friendships and popularity. For more information, see Matthew 19:21".⁸

This type of challenge draws youth! There is also the fact that where the theology of vocations in the Church is rather

⁶ "Priestly and Religious Vocations", in Celestine Obi ed., ***A Hundred Years of the Catholic Church in Eastern Nigeria***, African Publishers, Onitsha, Nigeria, 1985, 329.

⁷ "Religious Life in Africa", in USG, ***Religious Life in African Cultures***, Ariccia, 27 to 30 November, 1991.

⁸ See Jonathan J. Bank, ***"Reflections on Recruiting Missionaries Today"***, in Sedos Bulletin, vol. 22, no. 2, 15 February 1990, 42.

undeveloped, anyone who feels a call from God tends to think uniquely of the priesthood or the consecrated life. We still need to give equal weight to the call of God to the world and to the Christian family life.

Secondly, as persons considered closer to God, consecrated persons enjoy social prestige and this cannot but strengthen their vocation and make it more attractive even if the unregenerate side of man may wish to stop at the social side of it.

Finally, evangelical chastity, contrary to what some people think, is a symbol which speaks powerfully to some Africans. Some cultures seem to have a certain inner openness to this evangelical value. Bernard Haering mentions, for example, the Dagarti in Ghana, some peoples in Burkina Faso and the Igbo of Nigeria.⁹ From the background of the traditional religion, evangelical chastity is seen as assimilating a person to the spirits, a likeness which is considered the best condition for an intimate relationship with the other world. Among the Igbo, a Sister is considered "given to God" (the same terminology as used in marriage) and the parents as it were "in-laws" of God. People say, *o golu ogo na be Chukwu*, that is, God has taken a daughter of theirs in marriage, thus initiating a special relationship of affinity. As related in affinity, God is expected to fulfil his part in friendship and solidarity, and this has both spiritual and material repercussions.

I would like to add three other factors which seem to me most important and fundamental. The first has been alluded to several times. It is the impact of the traditional religion of the Igbo. In this religion there is a vivid sense of the presence of God or of the "gods" in the life of man. God can "call" only

⁹ *Ich habe mit offenen Augen gelernt.* Meine Erfahrungen mit einem anderen Kirche, Herder, 1992, 56, 108.

where he is experienced as present and active. African Traditional Religion structures all human life and action around religious values: there is no distinction between religion and culture, religion and morality, the sacred and the profane. Every action of man has both social and religious repercussions at the same time. Religion is, of course, highly relevant in such a milieu, and a vocation to serve religion appears as very reasonable and fulfilling.

The second factor is the very concept of vocation. The traditional concept of vocation is quite similar to that found in the Old Testament. It is held by the Igbo that the living God can intervene in the life of a person and take him or her totally to himself. The spirits and the deities of the shrines can do the same. Stories abound of *mami water* (the goddess of the sea) choosing certain men for herself, men who may not marry or give their attention to any woman. There are stories of men and women "wedded" to the god/goddess of a particular shrine. In 1987 a girl of 18 in Enugu felt a call to serve a spirit, but continued to refuse. She fell gravely ill each time she went back to school, the sickness stopping only when she agreed to serve the spirit. Psychologists will try to explain this away through auto-suggestion, but it is evident that even this such would derive its compelling force from a common belief rooted in the cultural milieu.

God's call can come through dreams or internal words. It can be discerned through certain processes of divination, or the community itself may discern it in one with the appropriate requirements.¹⁰ The spirit may indicate his choice of a person through possession. For some time such persons feel an internal compulsion to silence and solitude, wander around in forests, neglect the care of themselves. They are like people

¹⁰ Bengt Sundkler, *The Christian Ministry in Africa*, SCM, London, 1960, 14.

gripped by an idea which possesses them wholly. To feel oneself so called is at the same time to feel the necessity of a due response for who can resist God? And once on the path, to abandon it would be a scandal and an infringement of the pact with God. As they say, *muo ada elisie gbupu* (what the spirit has eaten, it never spits out, or what is given to the spirit is never taken back). It is thus that this important traditional value can also impede or diminish true internal liberty.

The third factor is the social relevance of religion. Religious consecration is seen as very important for the cohesion of society. Consecrated persons are necessary for the welfare of society and can contribute to it. This is because in the Igbo worldview human welfare hangs on the delicate balance between seen and unseen forces, a balance for which consecrated persons, at home in both worlds, are vital. Spirits and the recently departed maintain a symbiotic relationship with man. It is the persistent yearning of every Igbo youth to make some "contribution" to the development of the society. Self dedication to the service of God appears in this context as highly relevant to society.

A saying characteristic of the Igbo is, "where there is a will, there is a way", every objective is possible, with effort. They are a people oriented toward achievement in every direction, religion and vocation being just one dimension of life. Families believe that what one person can do, another can. If not, it must be for want of effort, and this would be both unmanly and a shame on the family. Hence, they lead delegations to the seminary or to the religious institute to have someone dismissed taken back. They will even promise in his or her name that this time the required effort will not be lacking, under pain of shame to the family! Perhaps they need to learn better that, at least in the sphere of vocation, the initiative belongs to God! "You have not chosen me, I have chosen you" (Jn. 15: 16). Vocation is not first of all a question of effort, nor are those

called necessarily the best in every human virtue. Rather, vocation is a grace and a gift from God who internally fits a person out and pulls him or her toward a certain life project. The willing and the doing equally come from God, even if they require continued human response. In this too the Son of Man has come not to destroy but to bring to fulfillment the inner religious dispositions of the Igbo.

Conclusion

In conclusion we can only say that among the Igbo, as everywhere else, the Refiner is at work clearing the dross to let the gold appear. Human beings are an unfathomed mystery and the depths of human motivations are known to God alone. Nevertheless, there are sufficient indications to assert that there are many vocations among the Igbo in these times because God who spoke through the religion of their ancestors now makes use of the traditional religiosity to cause to spring up vocations for the many needs and services of this young Church. Glorified be his name among us and among all peoples for ever!

Chukwuma James Okoye c.s.sp

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CARTA DOS ESTUDANTES DO BRASIL A RESPEITO DO CAPITULO GERAL

os Estudantes de Teologia

A Comunidade Padre Laval, que é a casa de Formação para os estudantes de Teologia da Província do Brasil, teve seu início em 1983. Desde o começo o projeto de Formação fez da pastoral o seu eixo. Atualmente os formandos são 5, e os Formadores 2. Juntos fazem parte da equipe de pastoral responsável por uma dezena de comunidades, e que é composta, além dos Espiritanos, por Religiosas e leigos.

Prezados irmãos:

Fazemos primeiramente alguns esclarecimentos iniciais:

O grupo de estudantes foi dividido em quatro pequenos grupos. Cada grupo participou num período integral de uma semana. A nossa participação foi junto à equipe de serviços. Não tivemos participação nos debates e sessões de trabalho. O relatório que apresentaremos se constitui a partir das nossas relações com os participantes do Capítulo Geral durante o período de trabalho, nos intervalos e nos momentos de lazer e oração.

Capítulo no Brasil

Pelo fato do Capítulo Geral ter sido realizado fora da Europa nos mostra que está havendo avanços significativos com relação à forma da Congregação adaptar-se e responder às

novas realidades emergentes da modernidade. Pois a miséria absoluta, a morte prematura e a fome que extermina grupos inteiros de pessoas da face da Terra, são indícios visíveis consequentes de certos aspectos negativos da modernidade. Esta situação exige que a Igreja tenha uma postura mais radical quanto à sua maneira de evangelizar e sua maneira de assumir a causa dos pobres socialmente. E assim como todos os países pobres, o Brasil é um exemplo claro de que carece de uma maior atenção por parte da nossa Congregação.

A participação de Leigos no Capítulo Geral

Analizamos como ponto positivo a presença e a participação de Leigos no Capítulo Geral. Isto significa que está havendo uma maior valorização e incentivo com relação ao trabalho dos Leigos na linha de frente da Congregação.

Tendo em vista a diminuição do interesse pela vida religiosa institucionalizada, é importante que os Leigos tenham voz ativa nas decisões da Congregação e de toda a Igreja.

Este fato requer de nós, formandos, uma maior atenção em relação ao trabalho dos leigos e sua importância para enfrentarmos os constantes desafios da modernidade.

Experiência significativa

As apresentações de algumas experiências significativas mostraram a diversificação dos trabalhos missionários realizados nos países onde atuam os membros da nossa Congregação. Por exemplo, entre outros:

- * O Movimento de Defesa do Favelado (MDF), que tem como objetivo a urbanização das favelas na cidade de São Paulo.
- * O acompanhamento e assistência prestada aos povos Pigmeus.

* A presença espiritana na Etiópia, mostrou o entrosamento que está havendo entre a Igreja Católica e a Igreja Ortodoxa Oriental da Etiópia.

Ao presenciarmos estas experiências, nos conscientizamos de que os desafios exigem de nós uma melhor opção missionária, para ajudar o povo pobre a encontrar soluções que respondam às suas necessidades básicas de sobrevivência, exigindo dos missionários uma maior inculturação.

Inserção dos Capitulantes no Brasil

A iniciativa de vários capitulantes terem vindo antes para uma experiência pastoral no Brasil, foi positiva "porque tiveram a oportunidade de conhecer de perto uma nova forma de ser Igreja e de se fazer Teologia, a partir de uma realidade concreta, e participando de diversas realidades pastorais".

Alguns capitulantes ficaram admirados com a organização das CEBs (comunidade Eclesial de Base). Pois constataram que a atuação dos leigos, principalmente das mulheres, é importante para a caminhada da Igreja no Brasil. Também foi uma oportunidade para conhecerem uma nova realidade de Igreja e foi a primeira vez que tiveram contato com a Teologia Latino Americana (Teologia da Libertação); - esta é produzida a partir da realidade sofrida do povo Latino Americano que clama por justiça e libertação.

O fato de não conhecer a Teologia da Libertação, alguns não compreenderam este novo modo de ser Igreja, isto é, uma Igreja mais participativa. Tendo em vista que esta Teologia necessita de uma nova prática pastoral, quer dizer, um maior tempo junto às Comunidades, alguns também questionaram sobre o nosso tempo disponível para os estudos.

Considerações finais

Em primeiro lugar, consideramos positivo a iniciativa de termos sido convidados a participarmos deste Capítulo. Em segundo lugar, constatamos que houve um bom entrosamento. E, por último, queremos agradecer a oportunidade que nos foi dada, e desejamos que nos próximos Capítulos este convite seja estendido também a outros estudantes.

Agradecemos a todos por mais esta oportunidade.
Fraternalmente desejamo-lhes sucesso.

Estudantes de Teologia

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SEMENCES LIBERMANNIENNES

par des étudiants spiritains

La communauté de Clamart est la maison de formation des étudiants de second cycle, à Paris. Pour préparer la fête du 2 février 1993, les étudiants ont lu ensemble la lettre du P. Libermann qu'il envoya à la Communauté de Dakar et du Gabon en 1847. Voici les principaux extraits des réflexions de: Bède UKWUIJE, Christian CARLIER, Jean-Marie OMBE ESSOMBA, Michel BESSE, Jean-Louis BARRAIN, Marc BOTZUNG, Michel SELLAYE, Thierry AUROKIOM, Derek Mc CARTNEY, Lambert NDJANA, Emmanuel MEAUDRE, Bernard DUCOL. Christian de MARE et Brendan COGAVIN ont aussi pris part aux échanges de la communauté.¹

INTRODUCTION

par Bernard DUCOL

Il y a plus de 150 ans, le 30 novembre 1843, les premiers missionnaires du Saint Coeur de Marie arrivent au Sénégal. Nous avons tous en mémoire, les débuts difficiles de leur apostolat sur les côtes d'Afrique.

Trois communautés missionnaires sont créées: Grand Bassam, Assinie, le Cap des Palmes et, en septembre 1844, une quatrième au Gabon. A différentes reprises, de nouveaux missionnaires viennent renforcer les communautés. Le 5 mai 1847, l'équipe de Mgr Truffet, le nouveau Vicaire Apostolique de la Mission des Guinées, arrive sur le sol africain.

Quatre mois plus tard, le 1er septembre 1847, Truffet adresse une lettre à Libermann dans laquelle il décrit l'état de la

¹ De leur conférence donnée le 2 février 1993 à la rue Lhomond, Paris.

communauté de Dakar et les difficultés rencontrées sur le plan de la vie communautaire et apostolique. Les missionnaires de Guinée ne sont pas tous sensibles de la même façon au radicalisme évangélique prôné par Truffet.

Une lettre de Libermann

Libermann vit à Amiens. Il écrit à cette communauté de Dakar et du Gabon le 19 novembre 1847. Mgr Truffet n'a pas lu cette lettre puisqu'il décéda le 23 novembre. Libermann, Supérieur et Fondateur du Saint Coeur de Marie, écrit à ses confrères pour leur donner des nouvelles et pour leur inspirer les qualités spirituelles de leur travail missionnaire. Il les encourage à être des hommes de communauté et des hommes apostoliques. Il les invite à se dépouiller de l'Europe.

Cette lettre est un des textes fondateurs de notre héritage spiritain. Sa renommée est liée à l'adage qu'elle contient: **"Faites-vous nègres avec les nègres"**.

Réception de cette lettre

Notre communauté de Clamart est internationale. Nous appartenons à des univers culturels différents (les Antilles: la Martinique; l'Afrique: le Nigéria et le Cameroun; et l'Europe: l'Irlande, l'Angleterre et la France). Nous avons voulu réfléchir sur cette lettre sans en faire une lecture objective. Nous sommes conscients d'avoir reçu partiellement le message du P. Libermann dans nos lectures et nos interprétations.

Nous ne demandons pas à notre histoire de nous fournir des modèles missionnaires mais d'éclairer le discernement de notre engagement spiritain. Cette lettre, comme chaque texte-fondateur, stimule notre service spiritain. Nous avons étudié son contexte historique, littéraire et biblique. Paul Coulon, par son étude, et Christian de Mare nous ont aidé à recevoir le message de Libermann. Puis, chacun a réagi et s'est montré plus sensible à tel aspect particulier de cette lettre.

Les Anglophones, sensibles à la vulnérabilité et de la fragilité de nos premières équipes missionnaires, actualisent cette vulnérabilité et cette faiblesse dans nos anciennes circonscriptions. Les Africains cherchent à mieux connaître l'influence du passé sur l'aujourd'hui de leur engagement spiritain. Les Martiniquais questionnent le mode de vie des Spiritains en Martinique. Peuvent-ils s'y intégrer dans le futur? Les Français relèvent la difficulté de comprendre certaines expressions de Libermann aujourd'hui comme, par exemple, "**Faites-vous nègres avec les nègres**".

Libermann nous intéresse. Nous croyons qu'il a encore quelque chose à dire pour notre temps. Nous entretenons avec lui un dialogue dans lequel nous sommes partie prenante; nous restons, cependant, convaincus que notre histoire n'est pas derrière nous mais devant nous.

VULNÉRABILITÉ ET FAIBLESSE

par Derek Mc CARTNEY, Angleterre

Un noviciat pratique

Il y a quelques mois, je finissais le noviciat. C'est une expérience encore très présente en moi. Ce que Libermann écrit à ses confrères: "**Maintenant, vous faites comme un second noviciat**" m'interpelle particulièrement. Le noviciat vécu dans la pastorale missionnaire forme notre vie spiritaine ou notre être Spiritain.

Durant le noviciat, on nous enseigne que la spiritualité spiritaine est simple. Elle nous invite à l'ouverture et à la confiance en Dieu et peut se résumer ainsi: attendre Dieu. Quand nous vivons de cette spiritualité, nous découvrons quelque chose. Si nous "attendons", nous ne contrôlons pas la situation. Cette spiritualité de l'attente de Dieu est difficile à vivre parce que nous aimons contrôler, nous pensons connaître toutes les solutions et nous sommes impatients d'agir. Lorsque nous ne parvenons pas à dominer une situation, nous ressentons, alors,

nos limites, notre vulnérabilité et notre faiblesse. Nous éprouvons ce que St Paul écrit aux Corinthiens: **"Lorsque je suis faible, c'est alors que je suis fort"**. (2 Co 12,10).

Cette spiritualité anime non seulement chaque Spiritain, mais aussi la communauté spiritaine, nos circonscriptions et l'ensemble de la Congrégation. Quelques lignes du dernier Chapitre Général illustrent cette spiritualité: **"En acceptant de se perdre lui-même, en plaçant toute sa confiance dans les autres, le missionnaire, éprouvera, comme St Paul, la joie du Christ ressuscité et glorieux"**. (Itaici 1992, p. 24). Cette spiritualité n'est pas seulement pour le premier noviciat que nous avons fait. Elle est également pour toute notre vie. Elle s'applique à chaque situation nouvelle dans laquelle nous nous trouvons. Notre vie est un noviciat permanent ou comme le dit Libermann: un **"second noviciat"**.

Espérances de ma Province

Je fais partie de la Province d'Angleterre. C'est une petite Province qui a beaucoup de confrères âgés et/ou malades et peu de jeunes. Nous sommes seulement deux étudiants en formation. Notre avenir est incertain. Dans cette situation, nous nous sentons fragiles et vulnérables. Et pourtant, nous relevons ce défi. Notre Province est attentive aux appels de l'Esprit; elle s'efforce à les suivre ce qui nous fait prendre certains risques. Notre espérance prépare le futur.

A Londres, six personnes sont engagées dans la Congrégation comme membres associés. Elles travaillent avec des jeunes dans un programme d'évangélisation. Deux autres communautés, une en Angleterre et une autre en Ecosse, animent une évangélisation adaptée pour des jeunes. Notre communauté de formation, formateurs et étudiants, assure deux services pour des sans-logis à Londres. Une nuit par semaine, nous distribuons de la nourriture à ceux qui dorment dans la rue. Nous rencontrons beaucoup de gens: des toxicomanes, des alcooliques, des enfants partis de chez eux et qui se prostituent. L'autre service est un accueil que nous assurons chaque jour dans notre maison. Pendant une heure,

nous invitons des sans-logis vivant dans notre quartier à venir pour parler avec nous et manger quelque chose.

Vivre la spiritualité de l'attente de Dieu n'est pas confortable, ni facile; on peut se sentir frustré, faible et vulnérable. Mais dans cette situation, nous croyons que nous sommes forts et que nous faisons la volonté de Dieu.

FAITES-VOUS NEGRES AVEC LES NEGRES

par Jean-Marie OMBE-ESSOMBA, Cameroun

Cette lettre du P. Libermann est composée comme "une épître pastorale d'inspiration paulinienne", écrit le Père Coulon. Il la présente ainsi: **"Une lettre d'inspiration paulinienne quand la mission s'identifie à la figure du Serviteur..."** Et il ajoute: **"La mission est à penser et à vivre comme une conversion et comme une kénose, à la fois culturelles et spirituelles, à l'imitation de Jésus-Christ."**¹ (p. 521. 523). La dialectique "abaissement/élévation" de Libermann se profile en toile de fond. Notre propos est différent. Sa base est une analyse socio-historique à partir du mot **"nègre"**.

Le missionnaire européen, Libermann et le nègre.

"Faites-vous nègres avec les nègres..." Cette exhortation n'est pas une formule rhétorique. Elle exprime la "sequela Christi" dans l'accomplissement de la Mission universelle du salut. En suivant les pas du Christ, le missionnaire ne peut garder un rang qui le placerait au-dessus des personnes qu'il évangélise.

¹ P. Coulon, "FAITES-VOUS NÈGRES AVEC LES NÈGRES", p 489-546 dans: P. Coulon, P. Brasseur et collaborateurs, **Libermann, 1802-1852**. Une pensée et une mystique missionnaires. Cerf, Collection Cerf-Histoire, Paris, 1988

Lorsque Libermann écrit en 1847: "**Faites-vous nègres...**", il s'adresse aux confrères européens qui sont en Afrique. Ils ne sont pas les premiers missionnaires à y aller. D'autres les ont précédés. Les récits de leurs histoires africaines sont connus. Ils ont suscité de l'admiration, de l'appréhension et, aussi, des préjugés, favorables ou défavorables envers les Africains. Ces récits ont transmis des idées et une manière occidentale de parler de l'Afrique.

Le "**Faites vous nègres...**" retentit comme un antidote contre les préjugés envers les Africains. Cette exhortation inspire la patience et l'humilité du missionnaire; elle l'invite à participer à la vie de l'homme africain comme l'Africain lui-même. Tel est, en substance, le message que Libermann écrit à ses jeunes confrères. Ils sont blancs et la recommandation leur sied parfaitement. En effet, hormis leur humanité commune avec les nègres, rien ne les prédispose, humainement parlant, à cette ressemblance pour le moins incongrue. L'homme cherche naturellement un mieux être. Tous ses efforts concourent à la réalisation de cet objectif. Cette exhortation de Libermann, sans ses références spirituel et théologique, serait un appel ou une recommandation contre nature.

Le missionnaire nègre, Libermann et le nègre.

Tout homme aspire naturellement au bonheur, au mieux-être et à plus d'humanité. Nous, les africains, les "nègres", nous sommes aussi des hommes. Il va sans dire que nous aspirons aussi à plus d'humanité. Alors que signifie pour nous "**faites-vous nègres...**"?

En Afrique, aujourd'hui comme hier, le terme "**nègre**" est porteur d'un contenu idéologique. A la limite de l'abjection, il signifie la désolation de la race noire. Le courant philosophique et littéraire de la négritude n'a pas suffisamment d'influence pour modifier la compréhension première du mot "nègre" dans l'esprit de l'Africain moyen. Pour lui, il signifie: "**employé de petite condition, sans qualification et corvéable à merci**"; ou pire encore: "**sale nègre**", c'est-à-dire: nature dépourvue de tout savoir et de toute esthétique à cause de la pigmentation

de sa peau. Pour sortir de l'ignorance, la réussite scolaire est sans conteste le chemin magique. Quant à la sortie de l'ines-thétique, c'est un rêve. **"Chaque société engendre ses dignitaires, établit des classifications entre ses membres, et délimite les frontières qui définissent son univers."**

Lorsqu'on parle de la vie consacrée, on parle volontiers en terme de "mise à part". Cette analogie, malheureusement, s'est toujours présentée sous la forme d'une séparation sociale d'avec la famille (point de vue sociologique africain). De plus, le prêtre, par sa formation, (et en plus s'il est religieux, par les flux financiers occidentaux), devient un dignitaire et échappe à la précarité de l' économie vivrière des petits gens.

Pour nous, Spiritains africains, le **"Faites-vous nègres..."** serait donc, aujourd'hui une interpellation, un appel urgent à nous poser la question de notre appartenance: de quel côté sommes-nous? Cette question nous invite à regarder avec attention notre statut de prêtre et/ou de religieux africains dans sa relation sociale, politique, économique et religieuse avec l'Afrique...

Laissons de côté ces situations africaines que les Occidentaux connaissent parfois mieux que nous. Laissons aussi de côté le statut du prêtre dans la société africaine. Mais, à partir de ce que nous suggère ces réalités, nous voulons souligner l'urgence d'une vraie solidarité avec nos frères africains. L'ensemble de la situation africaine, économique, politique, religieuse, culturelle et le sang qui coule dans nos veines de missionnaires africains nous rappellent chaque jour notre devoir envers l'Afrique.

Missionnaires africains aujourd'hui.

Le continent africain est en crise et, face à cette situation, les pays africains n'ont que des solutions de fortune. Sa crise est accrue par des réalités devenues planétaires. Les limites du village éclatent dramatiquement.

Le Spiritain africain est témoin d'une Afrique qui s'effrite. Les solidarités primitives sont battues en brèche. L'individualisme s'installe rapidement.

Le Spiritain africain est témoin d'une Afrique dévergondée où les moeurs ont perdu leur poids traditionnel et structurant.

Le Spiritain africain est témoin d'une Afrique à nouveau esclave, réduite à la mendicité, ne renvoyant d'elle-même au monde qu'une image de misère, de guerre, de famine, de sécheresse, de désespoir, d'assistée...

Le Spiritain africain est témoin d'une Afrique en larmes, squelettique, épuisée...

Africain lui-même, le Spiritain africain sent dans sa chair le dard de la mort emporter ses frères et l'emporter.

Au coeur de cette expérience, le Spiritain africain est appelé à devenir une voix de l'espérance en vivant une solidarité profonde et prophétique avec les siens.

Le Spiritain africain doit sortir de son univers et renoncer au rang de dignitaire de la société, rang qui lui est reconnu à cause de sa formation. Il doit se libérer de certaines structures qui le tiennent prisonnier, mis à part, insensible. Il s'agit pour lui d'être Africain et Spiritain, c'est-à-dire tout en étant pauvre, d'accepter de se faire pauvre pour les pauvres. Le Spiritain africain doit être membre d'une véritable communauté africaine de participation et de partage.

Le Spiritain africain doit gérer le conflit entre l'image qu'il se donne parmi ses confrères spiritains et celle qu'il a auprès de ses frères africains. Il est appelé à devenir une oreille attentive, un oeil vigilant, un coeur patient. Car, mieux que quiconque, il connaît ses semblables, porteurs des valeurs évangéliques enfouies dans le coeur de la tradition africaine. Mais, sans en être dupe, il a aussi à reconnaître les limites de celle-ci.

Le Spiritain africain et l'étranger en Occident.

Notre réflexion sur le Spiritain africain a été jusqu'ici une réflexion à sens unique. Elle nous situe en tant qu'Africains en Afrique. L'histoire nous y oblige. Aujourd'hui, elle nous invite à regarder la présence des Spiritains africains dans le monde occidental. Que devient alors l'exhortation du P. Libermann: "**Faites-vous...**"? Comment le Spiritain africain manifeste sa solidarité avec les gens qu'il rencontre?

La situation nouvelle de la Mission universelle est une situation de réciprocité, de solidarité, de coopération, de rencontres interculturelles. Elle nous demande de nous dépouiller d'une idée fixe sur notre identité culturelle pour accueillir les richesses des autres cultures. Elle nous demande de prendre le parti de tout homme asservi par les oppressions et la mort qui frappent à sa porte. "**Faites-vous nègres...**", à notre avis, ne s'adresse plus seulement aux confrères travaillant en Afrique, mais à chaque Spiritain, là où il vit. Ceci est notre conviction.

SPIRITAINS EN MARTINIQUE ET SPIRITAINS MARTINICAIS

par Michel SELLAYE, Martinique

Comme jeunes Spiritains martiniquais, nous voulons exprimer comment cette lettre du P. Libermann, écrite à des Européens en 1847 pour éclairer leur vie communautaire et apostolique en Afrique, nous inspire aujourd'hui, à l'aube du XXI^e siècle?

Les Martiniquais ont des origines variées: Africains et Indiens déportés comme esclaves; immigrés Chinois, Syriens, Haïtiens et Dominicains. Du XVI^e siècle à la fin du XIX^e siècle, la vie a été dure. Malgré la voie ouverte à notre émancipation, nous restons profondément marqué par l'assistanat.

Les Spiritains sont venus dans les Antilles pour promouvoir, avec d'autres Congrégations, un clergé autochtone. Dans le

contexte particulier de la Martinique, ils ont adopté un style de vie. Les circonstances les ont obligés à vivre seuls. Ils se sont mis au service d'une église fondatrice de paroisses. La rencontre avec les Martiniquais, en dehors des structures paroissiales, a été peu prise en compte. De ce fait, il n'y a pas eu de travail en profondeur auprès des petites gens et la spécificité spiritaine n'a pas toujours été perçue.

Aujourd'hui, les Spiritains ne peuvent conserver ce modèle. Le district est vieillissant. Le clergé local est de plus en plus nombreux. Trois questions nous sont posées: comment être Spiritain aujourd'hui en Martinique? Que signifie être Spiritain martiniquais? Comment créer une dynamique spiritaine dans le district pour mieux recevoir, connaître et vivre notre charisme?

Se faire connaître comme spiritain

La Congrégation assure de multiples services missionnaires dans une cinquantaine de pays, répartis sur cinq continents. Elle aide les églises locales à devenir responsables de la Mission Universelle. Il en est de même pour l'Eglise en Martinique. Le moment est venu pour elle, comme pour tous les Martiniquais, de participer et d'oeuvrer à la construction d'un monde plus humain et plus fraternel. Cette démarche passe par une prise de conscience de sa responsabilité. Les Congrégations religieuses, présentes en Martinique, doivent participer à ce travail de conscientisation. Il élargit le champ des vocations. Le temps est arrivé pour des candidatures à la vie spiritaine. Mais, comme spiritains, nous avons à devenir plus crédibles dans la société martiniquaise et, en particulier, auprès des jeunes. Nous devons préciser nos objectifs missionnaires et la fondation d'un centre d'animation pourrait nous aider.

Vocation spiritaine par la vie communautaire

Chez nous Spiritains, comme dans d'autres Congrégations, la vie communautaire est une vie de partage, de prière et de discernement communautaire. La communauté ressource et oriente notre vie apostolique. Un grand effort est à faire pour

renouveler notre vie commune. Ce renouveau contribuerait à la réconciliation des préjugés qui existent entre les couches sociales et entre les différentes communautés chrétiennes vivant à la Martinique.

Abandon à Jésus-Christ

Comme Spiritains, le désir de construire une "civilisation de l'amour" prend forme dans un abandon fidèle à Notre Seigneur Jésus-Christ sous le regard de Marie selon le charisme de nos deux Fondateurs. Nous sommes appelés à vivre ce charisme de communion pour vivre en vrais hommes de communauté et en vrais hommes apostoliques.

La lettre du Père Libermann nous aide à mieux comprendre notre vocation de Spiritains martiniquais et notre mission auprès des Martiniquais.

NOTRE LETTRE, C'EST VOUS! (2 CO 3,2)

par Michel BESSE, France

En communauté, nous avons reçu cette lettre que le P. Libermann adressait à ses confrères de Dakar et du Gabon au milieu du XIX^e siècle. Certaines expressions nous ont paru désuètes. Qui utilise encore le mot "**nègre**", au siècle des indépendances? Qui ose dire aujourd'hui: "**ne jugez pas selon l'Europe**" à la décennie qui bâtit l'Union Européenne? Qui peut demander de se faire aux nègres "**comme des serviteurs doivent se faire à leurs maîtres**", en ces années où l'Afrique ne semble plus maîtriser son devenir? Langage d'un temps révolu? Insistons un peu et cherchons à mieux comprendre le message de Libermann.

Exhortation désuète

"Faites-vous nègres avec les nègres". Cette exhortation transmet une des aspects importants de la spiritualité et de l'objectif missionnaires du P. Libermann. Pour connaître les réactions de mes proches, je me suis engagé à leur parler de

cette exhortation. Leur regard surpris et leur commentaire furent, pour moi, comme un échec. Je me suis senti relégué au XIX^e siècle par ce genre de réflexion: "Aujourd'hui, nous devons répondre à des situations d'urgence." Et pourtant ma conscience me dit silencieusement qu'il est plus facile d'être un "casque bleu" servant pendant 6 mois en Somalie que d'être Spiritain vivant pendant 15 ans au Sénégal!

En lisant Libermann, je me sens seul. Ses exhortations me font peur. Quand je dis à mes proches: **"Peu à peu, laissez aux Africains ce qui leur est propre"**, je leur deviens comme un "étranger"; moi-même, je me sens étranger à cette vision du P. Libermann. Si je me dépouille de l'Europe, est-ce que je deviendrai nègre? Rien n'est moins sûr! Et je rêve... Si Libermann me parlait aujourd'hui, je pourrais comprendrais son intuition! Si l'Afrique et l'Europe étaient semblables, les problèmes seraient résolus. Et si j'étais un missionnaire de la **"miséricorde divine", apôtre plein de vertu et de sainteté, vrai homme de communauté et vrai homme apostolique?**

Libermann a plus de cent cinquante ans; la vie africaine est très différente de la vie européenne; et moi, je me sens si limité! Il est difficile d'attendre le moment opportun pour comprendre son appel: **"Faites-vous nègres avec les nègres"**.

Exhortation sensée

En oubliant l'intitulé de sa lettre, nous nous désespérons et nous passons à côté de son message: **"François Libermann, à la Communauté de Dakar et du Gabon, Amiens, 19 Novembre 1847. Mes biens chers Confrères"...**

Communauté... Confrères... Le P. Libermann vient m'arracher à mon comportement individualiste: qu'est-ce que JE comprends? Comment JE vais faire? Il m'apprend à dire **"Nous"** en vivant en **"Communauté" avec des "Confrères"**. Il m'apprend à vivre en **"Eglise", appartenir au "Peuple de Dieu"**.

Seul, je ne peux rien faire. Seul, je ne peux que juger les **"nègres"** qui sont autour de moi. Les juger sommairement et

donner mes solutions aux situations d'urgence. Pour la Somalie: "il n'y a qu'à" leur donner du riz; pour l'Angola: "il n'y a qu'à" envoyer des casques bleus; pour Haïti: "il n'y a qu'à" resserrer l'embargo... Mon action? Ce sont des "il n'y a qu'à..." et, ainsi, je peux vivre tranquillement. En plus de ces solutions qui n'en sont pas, il y a un préjudice qui fait beaucoup de mal. C'est la méfiance envers les étrangers: **"Il n'y a rien à faire, ils sont tous comme ça, depuis toujours"...**

Le P. Libermann discerne l'équivoque qu'il y a dans des informations données par les colons aux missionnaires. Il les conseille: **"N'écoutez pas trop le dire des gens...Entendez ce qu'ils disent, mais que leurs paroles n'aient pas d'influence sur votre jugement. Ces hommes examinent les choses à leur point de vue, avec leurs propres préventions; ils fausseraient toutes vos idées...Examinez les choses avec l'esprit de Jésus-Christ..et animés de la charité de Dieu et du zèle pur que son Esprit vous donne."** Ce discernement éclaire le sens authentique de ce que les missionnaires sont appelés à vivre. La perfection apostolique qu'il propose n'est pas un idéal impossible à atteindre. La Mission, c'est l'Evangile qui transfigure les "blancs" que nous sommes et les **"nègres"** que vous êtes, afin que nous devenions ensemble le "Peuple de Dieu".

Communauté des étudiants

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LA CONGREGATION EN HAÏTI

par Emile Jacquot

Le P. Emile Jacquot (consécration 1951) a pratiquement passé toute sa vie au service des Haïtiens, en Haïti et à Brooklyn, New York. Après la chute de la dictature Duvalier en 1986, il retourne en Haïti avec les autres confrères Spiritains. En 1993, il rejoint la communauté spiritaine de Bordeaux.

Première République Noire

On ne peut comprendre l'histoire de l'Eglise d'Haïti et l'histoire de la Congrégation si l'on oublie que la République d'Haïti est née de la révolte des esclaves qui éclata en 1791.

Après 15 ans de violences, d'incendies, de meurtres et 2 ans de guerre contre le corps expéditionnaire français commandé par le général Leclerc, beau frère de Napoléon, le pays a acquis son indépendance. Haïti devient la première république noire.

Une Eglise nationale

Ces événements marquent toute la vie politique du pays. Haïti vit la hantise du retour des français. La nouvelle République a peur que son indépendance, si chèrement acquise, soit plus ou moins menacée par l'ingérence d'une puissance étrangère, y compris d'une ingérence que pourrait exercer l'Eglise Catholique Romaine. Le gouvernement haïtien, plus ou moins voltairien, voit en l'Eglise un contre-pouvoir. Aussi, maintes fois, il s'immisce dans ses affaires et la vassalise en se donnant le pouvoir de nommer les évêques et les curés.

Au moment de l'indépendance, en 1804, le Préfet Apostolique de l'époque, réfugié en Jamaïque, écrit: ***"Toutes les églises; exceptées celles de Port-au-Prince, de Saint Marc et des Cayes, sont incendiées depuis longtemps. Tous les missionnaires, exceptés cinq, sont morts de maladies ou assassinés."***

Une église quasi schismatique se forme. A partir de 1820, Haïti devient un refuge pour de prêtres en difficulté avec leur diocèse. Leur nomination est faite par le gouvernement haïtien. Clergé corrompu, formé de prêtres aventuriers et dévoyés, soucieux de faire de l'argent. Haïti accepte ces épaves. A Port-au-Prince, par exemple, on voit le curé de la cathédrale, faire après sa sieste une promenade à cheval, avec sa concubine en croupe!

Le Saint Siège tente plusieurs fois de mettre fin à cette déplorable situation; mais il est confronté aux intrigues des prêtres de l'île et à la mauvaise foi de certains dirigeants.

Le Saint Coeur de Marie

En 1843, l'un des envoyés du Saint-Siège, Mgr Rosati, apprend qu'une Congrégation missionnaire a été fondée à Amiens. Ses membres, les missionnaires du Saint Coeur de Marie, se destinent à venir en aide à l'Eglise en Haïti. Après consultation, le Saint Siège demande au P. Libermann d'envoyer des prêtres en Haïti. Le Père Tisserand est choisi. Nous sommes en Août 1843.

Le Père Tisserand

Eugène Tisserand est né d'un père français et d'une mère haïtienne, la fille du général Beauvais qui s'est battu pour l'indépendance de son pays.

Le Père Tisserand, pour ne pas éveiller les susceptibilités des prêtres présents dans l'île, tient d'abord secrète sa nomination de Préfet Apostolique d'Haïti. Il réussit à se faire accepter par

le gouvernement comme vicaire à la Cathédrale. Il obtient du Président d'Haïti, Rivière Hérard, le droit d'exercer son ministère, de faire venir des confrères et d'ouvrir un séminaire collège. La situation locale s'étant apaisée, le gouvernement haïtien nomme officiellement l'Abbé Tisserand **"Chef de l'Eglise Catholique de la République Haïtienne."**

En 1844, le P. Tisserand se rend en Europe pour refaire sa santé et trouver une solution au problème du personnel. Pendant son absence, le gouvernement est renversé. Le nouveau gouvernement, influencé par les intrigues d'un prêtre étranger à la Congrégation, M. Cessens, se montre beaucoup moins accommodant envers le P. Tisserand.

M. Cessens nourrit l'ambition de devenir chef de la mission d'Haïti. Pendant l'absence du P. Tisserand, il complotte ouvertement contre lui et réussit à lever une forte opposition. Les journaux s'en mêlent et se livrent à une vigoureuse campagne de presse contre le P. Tisserand et ses confrères.

A son retour, le P. Tisserand s'entend dire: **"Vous n'exercerez ici, en Haïti, aucune juridiction autre que celle que le gouvernement voudra bien vous accorder."** Pour éviter une rupture ouverte entre le gouvernement haïtien et Rome, le P. Tisserand annonce son départ pour rendre compte de sa mission le 30 avril 1845. Il quitte l'île avec ses confrères, les Pères Lossadat, Briot, Arragon et Bouchet.

Vers la fin de l'année 1845, le P. Tisserand, âgé de 31 ans, est nommé Préfet Apostolique pour la Guinée. En rejoignant son nouveau poste, le bateau sur lequel il s'est embarqué fait naufrage au large des côtes du Maroc le 7 décembre 1845. Il meurt noyé .

Premier retrait

Avec son départ, disparaît l'autorité ecclésiastique légitime en Haïti. Pour remplacer le P. Tisserand, faute de mieux et en désespoir de cause, la Propagande nomme l'intrigant M. Cessens qui jouit de la faveur du gouvernement. Le P. Liber-

mann ne peut y croire. Quand il fait observer que ce prêtre est un ivrogne et un concubin, le Cardinal Préfet de la Propagande se contente de répliquer ***"qu'autrement il n'y aurait eu personne à qui conférer une juridiction valide."***

Puis les gouvernements se succèdent à une allure rapide (1846-1847-1848). Ils ne règlent pas la situation de l'Eglise en Haïti. Il faut attendre 1859 et l'élection du nouveau Président haïtien: le Général Geffard. C'est un homme de bonne volonté. Il veut mettre de l'ordre dans les affaires de l'Etat et trouver un accommodement avec Rome.

Retour en Haïti

Le P. Schwindenhammer, Supérieur Général, prend connaissance des dispositions favorables du Président Geffard. Il écrit au Cardinal Préfet de la Propagande: ***"J'oserai prendre la liberté de rappeler à votre Eminence, les liens étroits qui unissent depuis longtemps notre Congrégation à Saint Domingue et combien nous serions reconnaissants envers la Divine Providence, si elle daignait se servir derechef de nos missionnaires pour la conversion et le salut de cette île."***

Le 15 juin 1859, en réponse à cette lettre, le Pape confie la mission d'Haïti à la Congrégation du Saint-Esprit. Le Père Pascal et plusieurs autres spiritains sont désignés pour aider le Délégué Apostolique, Mgr Monetti, dans ses tractations avec le gouvernement en vue de parvenir à un Concordat.

Le gouvernement haïtien vote le texte du Concordat le 10 mai 1860 que le Saint Siège ratifie. L'Eglise fait des concessions. Le gouvernement accepte la création de nouveaux diocèses mais se réserve le droit de choisir les titulaires de ces diocèses, ce choix étant ratifié par Rome. Le Président Duvalier utilise cette clause au maximum pour vassaliser l'Eglise d'Haïti. Cette clause est restée en vigueur jusqu'au voyage du Pape Jean Paul II, en Haïti, en 1983.

Le Délégué Apostolique, Mgr Monetti, fatigué, redoutant l'insalubrité du climat et l'instabilité politique, quitte le pays. Il demande au Père Pascal, son vicaire général, de continuer son oeuvre. Il est même question de faire du Père Pascal le premier Archevêque de Port-au-Prince, mais le Supérieur Général s'y oppose. La Congrégation oeuvre pour mettre fin au schisme et pour rétablir la hiérarchie. Elle reste cependant fidèle à son principe de ne pas présenter un de ses membres pour l'épiscopat.

Un prêtre du clergé de Bretagne, Mgr Testard du Cosquer, est nommé Archevêque de Port-au-Prince. Celui-ci, après un passage en Haïti pour étudier la situation et évaluer les besoins, retourne en France pour y chercher du personnel. Il revient quelques mois plus tard avec les premiers "Pères de Saint Jacques", la première équipe des Frères de l'Instruction Chrétienne de Ploermel et la première communauté des Soeurs de Saint Joseph de Cluny.

Pendant son absence, le nouvel Archevêque délègue ses pouvoirs au P. Pascal. Il le charge d'obtenir du gouvernement haïtien l'abrogation du droit de nommer les curés de paroisses. Le P. Pascal n'y parvient pas. L'Archevêque, fort mécontent, ordonne expressément au P. Pascal de déchirer en pleine chaire le décret du gouvernement sur la nomination des curés. Le P. Pascal, estimant les conséquences d'un tel acte de désapprobation, s'en abstient.

A son retour, l'Archevêque sanctionne le P. Pascal. Il le démet de ses fonctions et le nomme, ainsi que le Père Cheney, dans deux paroisses très reculées de l'île: à Jacmel et à Bodarie. Ils y meurent de misère, l'un le 14 et l'autre le 15 août 1865, sans l'assistance d'un prêtre. On ignore même la place exacte où ils sont ensevelis.

Saint Martial

La vie continue. Les séminaristes haïtiens viennent faire leurs études de théologie au Séminaire du Saint Esprit, à Paris. Pour s'y préparer, l'Archevêque de Port-au-Prince, Mgr du Cosquer,

demande aux Spiritains de diriger le Petit Séminaire qu'il vient d'ouvrir à Pétionville et qu'il transfère aussitôt à Port-au-Prince.

En 1871, 43 Spiritains travaillent dans l'île. Après la première guerre mondiale, en 1919, la Congrégation manque de personnel. Elle décide de remettre l'oeuvre du Petit Séminaire, le Collège Saint Martial, qu'elle a accepté de diriger "**provisoirement et temporairement**" à l'Archevêché de Port-au-Prince. La désapprobation est universelle. On rend l'Archevêché responsable de cette décision. Des pétitions circulent; les diplomates s' en mêlent. Pour tous, fermer Saint Martial est considéré comme "**une perte irréparable pour les intérêts religieux, intellectuels et sociaux de la République.**" Finalement, le Saint Siège intervient auprès de la Congrégation et le Supérieur Général revient sur sa décision.

En 1950, le président Dumarsais Estimé, préoccupé par le sort de nombreux enfants qui vagabondent dans la capitale, demande aux spiritains de diriger la maison qu'il ouvre pour eux. La Congrégation accepte. On commence avec 100 élèves, puis 150, pour atteindre le chiffre de 350. Dans la mesure du possible, la préférence est donnée aux enfants des familles les plus démunies. La plupart arrivent sans éducation première. Beaucoup souffrent de malnutrition. La Congrégation dirige l'oeuvre jusqu'en 1961.

L'ère duvaliériste

Haïti connaît à nouveau une période de troubles. Le Dr François Duvalier est élu Président en 1957. L' ère de la dictature des Duvalier commence. Par ses fameux "tontons macoutes", François Duvalier mâte toute velléité d'opposition et veut faire de l'Eglise sa servante docile.

Sous le couvert d'une "décolonisation" de l'Eglise d'Haïti administrée par des étrangers, Duvalier expulse d'abord trois évêques: Mgr Poirier, Archevêque de Port-au-Prince et Mgr Robert, évêque des Gonaïves, tous deux membres des Pères de St. Jacques, et Mgr Augustin, le premier évêque haïtien, auxiliaire de Port-au-Prince. Ce dernier manque de souplesse

selon le Président. Puis pour des raisons futiles, Duvalier expulse les PP. Grimenberger et Bettembourg, successivement, supérieurs du District spiritain.

Quelques mois plus tard, deux autres évêchés deviennent vacants par le décès de leur titulaire canadien. Duvalier laisse pourrir la situation, sachant qu'il a de bonnes cartes en main. Quatre évêchés sont vacants.

En 1964, Rome se résout à accepter le sacre de 5 évêques haïtiens, nommés par le gouvernement. L'un d'eux, Mgr Ligondé, est un duvaliériste notoire. Duvalier écrit: **"La révolution duvaliériste n'aura jamais à rougir de l'Archevêque de Port-au-Prince"**. Les événements qui suivent lui donnent raison. Les nouveaux évêques se rangent à la politique de collaboration de l'Archevêque de Port-au-Prince. L'Eglise d'Haïti subit aujourd'hui encore les conséquences néfastes de cette révolution duvaliériste.

Nouveau retrait

Le 15 Août 1969, neuf prêtres haïtiens dont cinq spiritains, - le groupe de prêtres le plus engagé dans l'application de Vatican II, - sont expulsés, sans préavis. On leur reproche d'intervenir dans leurs sermons chaque fois que les droits de l'homme ou les libertés fondamentales sont mis en question. Ces expulsions sont présentées comme **"un acte de clémence, en considération des services rendus dans le passé à la cause de l'éducation en Haïti par les Pères du Saint Esprit."** Autrement dit, si les coupables étaient livrés à la justice haïtienne à la place d'être expulsés, elle pouvait leur appliquer la peine de mort selon la loi anti-communiste votée par le Parlement.

Avec son Conseil, le P. Lécuyer, Supérieur Général de la Congrégation du Saint Esprit, considère impossible l'exercice normal du ministère des spiritains. Il décide le retrait de tous les spiritains travaillant en Haïti.

L'Archevêque de Port-au-Prince n'est pas sans responsabilité dans cette affaire. Il récupère Saint Martial, rebâti complètement par nos soins. Puis il organise le collège de telle sorte qu'il devient une source de revenus personnels non négligeables.

Nouveau ministère auprès des haïtiens

En 1972, les curés américains de Brooklyn, New York, sont confrontés à un afflux d'immigrés haïtiens qui ne parlent que le créole. Ils ne parviennent pas à communiquer avec eux. Leur évêque demande à Rome des prêtres pour s'occuper d'eux. Quatre spiritains, anciens d'Haïti, se rendent aux Etats Unis et se mettent au service des immigrés haïtiens. Trois autres confrères vont aux Bahamas et un au Canada pour exercer leur ministère auprès des haïtiens. Ils mettent l'accent sur la formation des adultes, (cours biblique, initiation à Vatican II), sur la visite des prisonniers et sur la défense des droits des Haïtiens dans les services américains d'immigration.

Retour des Spiritains

En 1986, Jean-Claude Duvalier est contraint à s'exiler. Le décret d'expulsion des spiritains est abrogé. Nous retournons travailler en Haïti. Sur une parcelle de terrain d'une de nos anciennes propriétés, nous construisons une maison qui sert actuellement à recevoir les aspirants. Ceux-ci sont assez nombreux; le gros problème est celui de leur formation. Cette maison est située dans un quartier très pauvre de Port-au-Prince, en bordure d'un bidonville où vivent plus de 25 000 personnes. C'est un choix délibéré du discript spiritain d'être proche des plus pauvres et de les servir.

Après des rencontres toutes décevantes avec l'Archevêque de Port-au-Prince, Mgr Ligondé maintient sa position: il refuse de reconnaître les droits de la Congrégation sur St Martial. Le P. Haas, Supérieur Général, nous déconseille alors de travailler dans le diocèse de Port-au-Prince. Le diocèse le plus pauvre en prêtres est choisi et son Evêque, Mgr Constant, confie aux spiritains la paroisse de Pont Sondé, un secteur pastoral

d'environ 100,000 habitants. Ce secteur est difficile. Les conflits terriens n'y sont pas rares. Les habitants sont tentés de résoudre leurs problèmes par la violence.

Depuis le coup d'Etat du 30 septembre 1991, le travail apostolique est devenu partout difficile. Les 4 curés voisins de Pont Sondé quittent leurs paroisses à cause de l'insécurité. Les militaires ont donné l'ordre au P. Dominique, alors curé de Pont Sondé, de quitter lui aussi sa paroisse. Il n'en a rien fait.

Le climat de terreur va en s'aggravant. Haïti revient de temps en temps à la une des médias sans que rien ne soit fait pour sauver ce peuple de l'insécurité, de la misère et du désespoir. ***"Dix-sept responsables d'ordres et de congrégations ayant une instance de gouvernement à Rome ont fait une démarche pour exprimer leur solidarité avec le peuple haïtien. Haïti est victime de la position ambiguë que l'on adopte à son égard, à commencer par les Etats Unis. Mais la même ambiguïté se retrouve dans l'Eglise, tant en Haïti qu'à Rome, et notamment dans la diplomatie vaticane."*** (Actualité Religieuse dans le Monde, No 117-15 décembre 1993, p 7).

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PRESENCE D'EGLISE EN TERRE D'ISLAM

par Raymond Gonnet

Raymond Gonnet fit ses études de théologie à Chevilly. Ordonné en 1969, il est affecté à Misserghin, en Algérie. Il étudia l'arabe classique et dialectal. Il fut le dernier Supérieur de Misserghin, nationalisé en 1975. Il Travailla comme éducateur pour l'Assistance publique d'Oran, puis fonda, avec un ami algérien, une association prenant en charge les enfants déficients mentaux (ils sont 250). Actuellement, le P. Gonnet vit à Mascara avec, pour seules paroissiennes, deux religieuses. Leur premier service est de partager les souffrances et les espoirs de leurs proches pris dans la tourmente.

Algérie: repères historiques

Dès le deuxième siècle, le rayonnement chrétien atteint l'Egypte et l'Afrique du Nord. L'évangélisation progresse à l'intérieur de l'Empire romain. L'Eglise en Afrique du Nord devient très florissante. Cette Eglise, cependant, va s'affaiblir par le schisme africain des donatistes, les dissensions entre les hiérarchies parallèles (évêques donatistes contre évêques catholiques) et par les différentes invasions: Vandales, Byzantins, Arabes, Espagnols et Turcs.

1830: Conquête française avec colonisation de peuplement.

1954: Début de la guerre d'indépendance de l'Algérie. Cette guerre de libération fut très meurtrière.

1962 Les accords d'Evian; proclamation de l'Indépendance et exode de la majorité de la population européenne (1,5 million). Election de M. Ben Bella comme Premier Ministre, puis, en 1963, comme Président de la République.

L'arabe est la langue nationale officielle; l'Islam est la religion de l'Etat; constitution d'un régime socialiste; nationalisation des

terres et de l'enseignement; développement d'une industrie lourde (hydrocarbure).

Le Parti Unique et l'Armée Populaire sont au pouvoir.

1965: Coup d'état militaire dirigé par le ministre de la défense, le Colonel Boumedienne; il devient un des leaders du monde arabe et des pays non-alignés.

L'arabisation de l'enseignement, de la presse et de l'administration favorisent l'infiltration de l' islamisme.

1979: le Colonel Chadli est élu à la présidence de la République. Dans les années 80, l'Etat s'affaiblit par le développement d'un capitalisme sauvage et par la corruption...

1988: au mois d'octobre, grèves, révoltes et répression; explosion populaire; modification de la Constitution qui introduit le multipartisme.

1990: Succès du Front Islamique du Salut (F.I.S.) aux élections municipales. Le F.I.S. demande la dissolution de l'Assemblée Nationale et des élections nationales.

1991: Suppression du processus électoral qui allait conduire le F.I.S. au pouvoir. Destitution du Président Chadli par l'Armée.

Répression anti-islamiste: environ 12.000 personnes sont arrêtées et déportées au Sahara; cette répression provoque le terrorisme ou la guérilla dont l'objectif est de prendre le pouvoir politique. Les assassinats et les destructions deviennent l'actualité quotidienne.

LE GROUPE SPIRITAIN

Internationalité

Six confrères venant de 4 pays forment le groupe spiritain en Algérie: un Américain, un Zaïrois, membre de la F.A.C., un

Polonais et trois français.

Rien ne nous prédisposait à vivre ensemble, si ce n'est la foi au Christ vivant qui nous unit dans son amour pour être ses témoins en terre d'Islam, dans le cadre de la Congrégation. L'harmonie de notre vie commune et interculturel est un véritable défi. Nous le relevons chaque jour pour que chacun se sente de la famille, reconnu, soutenu, respecté, valorisé et aimé.

Différents par nos origines, nous évoluons dans un monde arabo-musulman, tiraillé entre tradition et modernité, et violemment secoué par la révolution islamiste infiltrée dans tous les milieux.

L'internationalité, si elle est une richesse pour le groupe, est aussi une source de fragilité. Plusieurs Provinciaux pourraient se décider à rappeler leur confrère en même temps, comme cela a failli arriver pour deux d'entre nous, cette année.

Permanence de notre présence

Notre ministère est avant tout celui de la rencontre. Il faut du temps pour qu'une amitié s'approfondisse et porte fruit; elle se construit au fil des jours, des événements familiaux, des fêtes religieuses, etc... C'est le dialogue de la vie, souvent plus vrai que le dialogue purement religieux. Il s'inscrit donc dans la durée. Il nécessite aussi un investissement linguistique et religieux d'au moins deux ans. Ces exigences posent la question de la durée de l'affectation des confrères dans notre groupe.

L'animation des communautés chrétiennes nous occupe assez peu. Un confrère est curé de la Cathédrale d'Oran (une centaine de chrétiens); un autre, responsable d'une petite communauté (25 membres) à Sidi-Bel-Abbès. Toute notre vie est donc orientée vers la rencontre: des jeunes, des hommes, des femmes, des enfants, plus ou moins dans la mouvance de l'Islam ou de l'Islamisme.

La rencontre se vit à travers différents services que nous rendons: Bibliothèque Universitaire très fréquentée gérée par le Diocèse, l'Institut de Langues avec les cours de français et l'accueil, animation de locaux sociaux: travail de promotion féminine par des Soeurs, salle d'études, accueil des handicapés, etc...

Ces lieux, ainsi que nos Maisons, deviennent des lieux de rencontres qui nous permettent de mieux nous connaître, d'échanger sur la vie, sur l'homme, sur la religion, sur Dieu, etc... C'est aussi un apprentissage à la réflexion personnelle. Ces rencontres nous permettent de lancer des ponts entre groupes humains et religieux si enclins à s'affronter.

Accueil

Le groupe spiritain est bien inséré dans la vie algérienne. Nous pouvons accueillir des jeunes laïcs, des séminaristes et des confrères pour des périodes courtes; des Spiritains en formation, en particulier les membres des Jeunes Fondations, pour une période plus longue (un à deux ans). Ils peuvent rendre des services ponctuels, donner un témoignage original et, en même temps, faire connaissance avec un monde humain et religieux si différent.

Aujourd'hui, la connaissance de l'Islam devient une nécessité pour des missionnaires. Quelle place l'Islamologie tient-elle dans la formation de nos jeunes? Actuellement, l'Islamisme étend ses tentacules de Madagascar au Sénégal, en passant par le Maghreb et l'Europe. Comment promouvoir l'entraide spiritaine face à cette situation?

Animation du groupe spiritain

Nous nous rencontrons une fois par mois, en week-end, dans une de nos Maisons. Ce temps de réflexion et de prière fraternelles nous soutient beaucoup.

Cette année, l'évêque d'Oran propose à notre groupe de réfléchir sur ce thème: "Notre présence d'Eglise en terre

d'Islam". Une étape ultérieure serait d'entraîner tout le diocèse dans cette réflexion: regard sur ce que nous vivons, analyse des événements du pays, attention aux aspirations des gens.

Sans doute, nous serons amenés à adapter notre vie à la situation présente.

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SPIRITAIN ZAÏROIS EN ALGERIE

par Innocent Nzemba Muanda

Le P. Nzemba est né à Kangu au Zaïre. Membre de la Fondation de l'Afrique Centrale (FAC), il est ordonné prêtre en 1991 à Boma. Sa première affectation est l'Algérie. Il capta la sympathie des Algériens, surpris de rencontrer un prêtre noir. En octobre 1993, le groupe spiritain en Algérie voulut marquer sa solidarité avec les confrères éprouvés de Nouakchott, Mauritanie. Innocent s'est porté volontaire et il les a rejoint.

Une joie pour l'"Apôtre d'aujourd'hui" est de découvrir la mission en cette fin de siècle; elle retrouve sa fonction essentielle. Car, au cours des deux millénaires qui s'achèvent, les missionnaires lui ont donné bien des formes...Je paraphrase ainsi une réflexion de Jacques Loew pour introduire ce témoignage sur mon expérience missionnaire en Algérie. Je souligne encore le fait que je suis Noir Africain et très jeune dans l'expérience missionnaire. Cet article pouvait être écrit par des confrères spiritains vivant en Algérie depuis des décennies. Il m'a été demandé. Je vous livre donc, d'une voix timide et d'une plume encore hésitante, mes premiers regards de missionnaire "novice".

Une attente active

Deux mois après mon ordination sacerdotale, avec la fougue et l'enthousiasme du départ, j'ai rejoint le poste de ma première affectation: l'Algérie. J'habite à Sidi Bel Abbès, ville algérienne de 300.000 habitants, à majorité musulmane. Là, une communauté chrétienne de 25 membres m'accueille. La majorité sont

des africains qui étudient à l'Université de Bel Abbès.¹ Venant du Zaïre, j'ai en mémoire la liturgie florissante et envoûtante de mon église. Découvrir un milieu dans lequel le message de Jésus-Christ, mort et ressuscité pour le salut de l'homme, est semblable à ces lettres qui nous reviennent avec la mention: **"Inconnu, n'habite plus à l'adresse indiquée"**, m'a troublé. Qu'est ce que je suis venu faire ici? A moins d'être un **"fou du Christ"**, il n'est pas facile de répondre à ce genre de mission. Avant mon départ d'Afrique Centrale, j'ai reçu des propos plutôt décourageants: **"Toi! Noir Africain! tu vas en Algérie pour la mission; mais, c'est de la folie!..."**

Et pourtant, l'occasion m'est offert de découvrir et d'approfondir une dimension missionnaire qui n'est pas étrangère à l'esprit de notre Congrégation: notre présence parmi d'autres croyants ne partageant pas les mêmes convictions religieuses que nous et avec lesquels nous vivons quotidiennement en acceptant nos différences et en dialoguant..

La première étape de mon insertion missionnaire fut de prendre du temps pour découvrir l'Algérie avec ses différents paysages naturel, religieux, et socio-politique. Les confrères spiritains m'ont beaucoup aidé: en particulier, Raymond Gonnet, Supérieur du Groupe, pour mon insertion algérienne et René You pour l'islamologie.

Histoire de l'Eglise de l'Afrique du Nord

J'ai commencé par m'informer sur la présence chrétienne en Afrique du Nord en lisant quelques livres. Mais j'ai surtout rencontré et écouté des livres "vivants" comme Mgr. Henri Teissier, Mgr. Pierre Claverie, l'incontournable Cardinal Duval ou encore le Père Scotto..., au cours des conférences ou des conversations. Avec eux et bien d'autres personnes, j'ai découvert l'histoire de cette Eglise d'Afrique du Nord, si riche et si complexe. Elle s'inscrit dans la trame très mouvante de

¹ Une juive, un couple de "pied noir", deux chrétiens algériens et quatre soeurs.

l'histoire générale du bassin méditerranéen, durant les premiers siècles de l'ère chrétienne. Histoire passionnante qui a laissé à la postérité le souvenir de nombreux martyrs, le témoignage d'une vitalité et d'une foi profonde. Trois grandes figures émergent de la période antique: celles de **Tertullien**, de **Saint Cyprien** et surtout de **Saint Augustin**. Cette terre donna trois Papes à l'Eglise: **Victor Premier** (189-199), **Miltiade** (311-314), **Gélase Premier** (492-496).

Une histoire douloureuse et tourmentée aussi! Les déchirements internes, venus s'ajouter aux persécutions, les schismes, les invasions successives la rendant vulnérable, au point de la faire disparaître progressivement après l'invasion musulmane. Cela a entraîné jusqu'à nos jours le déracinement quasi total de la souche d'Isaac au profit de celle d'Ismael; pourtant toutes les deux se réclament d'une descendance commune: Abraham.

Il fut un temps où les Eglises chrétiennes poussaient comme des champignons en Afrique du Nord. Puis, au cours des siècles, ces Eglises furent transformées en mosquées, en écoles, en bibliothèques, voire en marchés. Et les chrétiens sont maintenant réduits à ne représenter qu'un grain de sable dans un océan islamisé, un petit peu de levain dans une grande quantité de pâte.

En découvrant ces réalités bouleversantes, j'ai senti naître une confirmation en moi: **"L'Eglise, ce n'est pas d'abord le temple fait de pierres, c'est avant tout une communauté de fidèles. Et nous sommes les pierres vivantes de l'édifice. Par Jésus-Christ, nous devenons la demeure vivante de Dieu."** C'est dans cette perspective que j'ai pu comprendre le témoignage du Père Jean Scotto. Il pleurait, non pas sur la disparition des églises "bâtiments", mais sur la disparition des communautés chrétiennes.

La société algérienne

Partant de ce qui se vit actuellement dans les secteurs politique, économique, social et religieux, je constate, comme bien

des gens, que l'Algérie a une histoire mouvementée et qu'elle traverse de nos jours, une période de crises sans pareille.

Sur le plan politique et social, le rejet de la domination toute-puissante de l'"**Etat Démiurge**" s'est concrétisé par la révolte d'octobre 1988; ce mouvement socio-religieux a ouvert la voie au changement. L'accès à la démocratie et à la stabilité d'une société déstructurée ne se fait pas aisément. Un sérieux problème d'identité existe, rendu encore plus aigu par les mauvaises conditions socio-économiques. Il n'y a pas de consensus politique. Les difficultés et les aspirations des différents groupes sociaux ne sont pas les mêmes. Aujourd'hui, la société algérienne est une société divisée. Elle recherche une identité nationale. Cette nouvelle identité se développe difficilement à cause des assassinats touchant essentiellement l'élite du pays et à cause de l'arrestation d'algériens qui restent en prison arbitrairement, sans jugement.

Rien ne marche au niveau des instances politiques. Il y a un silence froid et inquiétant. La jeunesse ne croit plus en l'avenir du pays. Leur propre avenir se dessine en noir. Le rêve de tous les jeunes est de partir, de traverser la mer des miracles en espérant une vie meilleure, mais ailleurs!

Sur le plan religieux, ce qui m'impressionne le plus, c'est l'afflux des croyants dans les mosquées. Les minarets, munis de haut-parleurs, les invitent à la prière. Il y a un certain triomphalisme ambiant qui agresse, psychologiquement, les croyants d'autres religions.

Dans ce contexte, une question me vient parfois à l'esprit: **"Qu'est-ce que je suis venu faire ici? me faire "musulmaniser", souffrir que ma foi soit méprisée?"**

J'entends des musulmans crier leur prière: **"Allah akbar"** qui signifie **"Dieu le plus grand"** et je me dis, c'est une vérité pour eux! Et **Dieu Amour...** voilà ce que je peux partager avec eux dans ce contexte d'indifférence froide, de méfiance et de mépris de l'autre. C'est ainsi que ma rencontre avec l'Islam, au lieu de jouer comme une provocation, au moins par réaction

inconsciente face à cette religions bien affirmée, fortifie ma foi chrétienne. Mon baptême m'aide à aimer l'autre comme moi-même, à le respecter dans ses diversités et ses convictions profondes.

Le pays et ses paysages

Il n'est pas facile de vous présenter en quelques lignes l'Algérie que j'ai découvert au cours de mes sorties. C'est un pays immense aux aspects très divers, tant sur le plan géographique que sur le plan humain: Le Tell méditerranéen, les montagnes enneigées, les steppes d'Alfa des hauts plateaux, le Sahara lui-même fort varié, les rudes villages Kabyles, les palmeraies des oasis, les ruines romaines, les mosquées andalouses et turques, les villes européennes, le Mzab Unique, les tentes nomades...

Parmi tous les paysages découverts, le désert est celui qui m'a le plus saisi. Sa beauté nous envahit. Une lumière enveloppante fait deviner ce qu'est la présence immense et intime de Dieu; les teintes du sable offrent des beiges très variés, du plus clair au plus mauve. Chaque nuance est encore diversifiée par les reliefs, les vallonnements, les dunes et les rides dessinées par le vent en surface du sol. C'est un bonheur immense de regarder indéfiniment un tel paysage. Il est porteur d'une beauté divine; il est plein de Dieu!

Et quand on a la chance de s'isoler dans un coin du désert, en contemplation ou en méditation, on croit entendre le bruit du silence! A un jeune Algérien qui me demandait comment je trouvais son pays, je lui répondis: **"l'Algérie est un paysage plein de Dieu; elle a vu naître et venir auprès d'elle des "Insurgés de Dieu".**

Un projet apostolique

Après quelques mois, j'ai pris conscience que l'Algérie m'inculquait progressivement ses réalités culturelles. Il y a peu de temps, je finissais mes études. J'éprouvais un besoin ardent de faire quelque chose de précis pour ne pas me réduire à un

homme inutile . Je vis avec un confrère bien occupé par ses cours de français. Ce travail est un lieu de rencontre avec le monde algérien; en plus, il apporte quelque chose dans la bourse de la communauté. Pour ne pas finir comme un touriste, prêt à partir le moment venu, notre évêque m'a proposé un apostolat: l'aumônerie des étudiants "Africains" de Sidi Bel Abbès. J'avais à découvrir le monde universitaire, ce monde de la jeunesse. Je me suis aperçu que la vie estudiantine en Afrique n'était pas très différente d'un pays à l'autre. Les universitaires africains semblent tous être exposés aux mêmes méandres de la vie, aux mêmes vicissitudes, aux mêmes contraintes et aux mêmes contrastes. Ainsi j'ai retrouvé l'isolement des étudiants étrangers et le manque de chaleur fraternelle du pays hôte envers eux. Pour vivre le mieux possible ce temps d'exil, les étudiants étrangers sentent la nécessité de se regrouper en association ayant un statut bien élaboré et un projet d'activités réalisables.

A mon arrivée, l'association comptait 70 membres originaires de 16 pays différents. 80 % sont musulmans. Je me suis trouvé au coeur de notre "mission de présence" en milieu musulman. Pour mieux connaître les étudiants et découvrir les réalités qu'ils vivent, je les ai visités dans leur chambre à la cité universitaire ou je les ai rencontrés sur le terrain de football. Dans la joie des retrouvailles, on se rassemble autour d'un thé, préparé à la mauritanienne ou à la sénégalaise, à la malienne ou à la nigérienne; ou même autour d'un plat de semoule préparé à la congolaise ou à la guinéenne.

C'était l'occasion de se raconter nos histoires, les nouvelles de nos pays et d'échanger sur nos différentes traditions et religions. Les visages multiples de l'Islam se dévoilent. C'est l'Afrique qui parle avec nostalgie ou avec un sourire aux lèvres, sourire révélant parfois des larmes qu'une main ne peut essuyer. A les entendre parler, je revis des réalités de chez moi: pays sinistrés par les guerres civiles ou tribales, maladies de toutes sortes; pays où la souffrance des malades atteint son paroxysme et les réduit à l'état d'un animal prêt à crier à chaque moment; malades dont la vie ne tient plus qu'à un fil...

Cependant, l'écoute permet de dépasser rapidement ce temps de partage des souffrances pour s'atteler à des choses épanouissant et divertissant davantage le groupe. Nous organisons, avec le groupe d'Oran dont s'occupe mon confrère Claude, des journées de récollection; des conférences, des soirées culturelles et dansantes, des rencontres sportives. Tout cela permet des moments de rencontres fraternelles, avec des étudiants étrangers vivant dans d'autres cités universitaires (Oran, Mostaganem, Tiaret...), sans oublier nos amis algériens et algériennes invités à nos soirées.

Au cours d'une année, les célébrations des grandes fêtes chrétiennes, en particulier Noël, sont des moments merveilleux. Ces mêmes jeunes, musulmans et chrétiens, toutes nationalités confondues, remplissent notre chapelle. Voir quelques chrétiens faire une communauté priante avec des étudiantes et étudiants musulmans (Algériens, Marocains, Maliens...) et avec les amis du quartier, chanter ensemble dans l'allégresse: **"Je crois en Dieu qui chante et qui fait chanter la vie..."** nous donne des moments de profonde émotion.

Une autre merveille vécue est l'hospitalité que nous réserve quelques familles algériennes. Elles font de nous des membres de leurs familles. Elles sont attentives à notre vie et sont toujours prêtes à nous rendre service.

Ce qui marque encore notre présence missionnaire est la rencontre-dialogue avec la jeunesse algérienne. Nous faisons un accueil direct à la communauté. Mais, comme presque toutes les paroisses du Diocèse d'Oran, nous disposons aussi d'une bibliothèque et d'une grande salle polyvalente; ce sont des lieux de rencontre avec le monde algérien et les étudiants étrangers. Là, nous dialoguons avec des filles et des garçons, des jeunes et des adultes. Parfois les larmes des yeux parlent davantage que les paroles. Des visiteurs cherchent quelqu'un à qui se confier. Tel visiteur est tenté par le suicide. Il commence par nous dire: **"Je cherche quelqu'un à qui parler, à qui me confier. On m'a rassuré que vous, les prêtres, vous êtes disponibles à écouter les gens et qu'on peut vous faire confiance."** Puis il vide son sac plein de problèmes. Après une

écoute qui le réconforte, il esquisse un petit sourire et soupire. Il ajoute: **"Enfin j'ai pu parler à quelqu'un, librement, sans crainte. Quelqu'un a donné de son temps pour m'écouter et me remonter le moral alors que j'étais au bord du suicide."** Après un temps d'écoute, parfois tel visiteur nous dit: **"Vous avez toutes les qualités d'un vrai et bon musulman; qu'est-ce que vous attendez pour le devenir de peur que vous n'alliez en enfer en demeurant chrétien!"** D'autres encore tiennent ce langage envers moi: **"Qu'un européen (un français) soit chrétien ou prêtre, c'est normal. Mais, qu'un africain, qu'un noir soit chrétien et prêtre, au lieu d'être musulman, cela nous dépasse. Et, en vous voyant vivre sereinement vos relations fraternelles avec nous qui sommes musulmans, on se demande s'il n'y a pas quelque chose de mystérieux et de meilleur dans votre religion."**

Sans prétendre convertir des musulmans à la religion chrétienne, nous rencontrons, cependant, quelques jeunes algériens qui nous demandent d'être initiés à la vie chrétienne. Nous les accompagnons dans leur recherche.

Toutes ces expériences, je ne les aurais pas vécues comme telle sans le soutien de la communauté spiritaine. J'aimerais dire un mot d'elle avant de conclure.

La vie communautaire spiritaine

La communauté est la pierre angulaire de notre présence missionnaire en Algérie. Présence tantôt active, tantôt passive. L'histoire des spirite en Algérie remonte au début du siècle; elle a marqué l'histoire agricole du pays avec **"la clémentine"**, du nom du Frère Clément, devenu Spirite après avoir réussi la greffe d'orangers produisant cette variété de mandarines très appréciées dans la région.

Nous vivons l'expérience d'une internationalité surprenante à première vue; mais nos différences s'harmonisent bien. Notre groupe spirite en Algérie est composé d'un Zairois, d'un Polonais, d'un Américain d'origine libanaise et de trois Français. Notre vie communautaire est une vraie alchimie! Est-ce

l'image du Royaume que le Christ a inauguré et dans lequel nous sommes un? Peut-être. Si notre équipe ne souffre pas d'une trop grande fragilité, c'est parce que nous ne nous contentons pas seulement de l'amitié, de la camaraderie et de l'affection fraternelle entre nous. Les uns et les autres, nous recevons cet amour du Christ qui nous unit. Rencontres, présence et dialogue se jouent directement entre le Christ, nous et notre Règle de Vie. Voilà la source jaillissante à laquelle nous nous désaltérons ensemble, une fois par mois, dans l'une de nos communautés, soit à Oran, à Bel Abbès ou à Mascara.

Conclusion

Après ces deux ans de présence en Afrique du Nord, je ne parlerai pas des sacrifices qu'il fallut faire; je croie être heureux, même si je n'ai inscrit aucun nom dans un registre de baptêmes. Je dis "je crois" afin de ne pas tomber dans un enthousiasme merveilleux pour tout ce que je vis ici.

En définitive, sans être musulman, sans chercher à le devenir, je sais qu'il existe quelque chose de Dieu que l'on trouve dans le regard sympathique d'un musulman, dans le sourire d'un enfant musulman; dans un bouquet de roses qu'un musulman ou une musulmane vient nous offrir à l'occasion d'une fête religieuse ou d'un anniversaire, ou encore dans un repas fraternel partagé dans une famille musulmane nous invitant à sa table. Signes multiples qui révèlent le dépassement possible des différends existant entre nos religions. Nous pouvons bâtir ensemble une société de paix, d'amour; une société fraternelle.

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GOD HEARS THE CRY OF THE POOR

By John Skinnader

John Skinnader is an Irish Spiritan. After Theology at Kimmage Manor, Dublin, he studied Missiology for one year at the Mill Hill Institute, London. He worked in Sierra Leone for ten years where he was chairman for the Kenema diocese Justice & Peace Commission. He founded the Concerned Citizen's Action Group. Before his appointment to the Generalate, he did a one year course in Justice & Peace studies at Maryknoll, New York.

Recently under the directive of the last Chapter at Itaici which called for specific encouragement to all in the area of Justice and Peace (An urgent plea for animation, Itaici 1992, No33), I accepted an invitation to animate the Major Religious Superiors meeting at Bangui in Central Africa and at the same time to make Solidarity in Justice visits to the FAC members of the Congregation. This took me to the countries of Cameroon, RCA, Gabon, Congo, Senegal, Gambia and Sierra Leone.

Everywhere in Africa I found a situation as described in a recent copy of Time magazine: ***"Africa has a genius for extremes. At times it seems connected to some memory of Eden and at the same time, some foretaste of the apocalypse. Nowhere is day more vivid or night darker. Nowhere are forests more luxuriant and yet nowhere is there a continent more miserable. Much of the continent has turned into a battleground of contending dooms: aids and over-population, poverty and starvation, illiteracy, corruption, social breakdown, vanishing resources, overcrowded cities, drought, war and the homelessness of wars refugees."***

"Africa has become the basket case of the planet, the "Third World of the Third World", a vast continent in free fall, a sort of neo post colonial breakdown." (Time, 7 Sept 1992)

The question facing Spiritans today is: ***How do we as Missionaries bring the Gospel of Good News into this situation?*** What would be "***Good News***" for Africa today? Does God hear the Cry of the Poor? I believe He does through the - Local and Missionary Church - who are living and working with the poor. The presence of the Church offers hope and inspiration where normally no hope is to be found. For this reason, the Church must be open to explore new ways to support the poor in their struggle to improve the quality of their lives. One vital area today is the whole dimension of working for Justice and Peace.

It was on this last point that I was able to share with the confreres, on my visit to Central and West Africa, my own story of how I became involved in Justice and Peace work.

I had previously spent nearly 10 years in the small West African country of Sierra Leone. In 1992, this country was put at the bottom of the United Nations Development League as the most underdeveloped country in the world. Yet it is the richest in terms of natural wealth - gold, diamonds, bauxite, coffee, rice, rain and sunshine. The richest country with the poorest people! It was in this environment that I got my first missionary experience. From the middle of the 1980s, when the country really began to nosedive into its present chaos, one could sense the frustration of missionaries at every assembly and public meeting, as to what could be done by us to address this chaotic situation. The question on everybody's lips were: ***"What can we do? Where do we start?"***

As regards my own response to these questionings, the big breakthrough came one Sunday morning after Mass in 1987. A number of parishioners (mainly women) came to the mission and explained that they were being unduly harassed at the checkpoints, set up by the Government, as part of their Economic Emergency Plan. They wanted us to accompany them to meet with the local authorities and the Government officials responsible for the running of the district. This we readily agreed to do. A time was set for the following morning and information sent to the relevant authorities that we needed

to meet them. We met with these authorities and within a week the checkpoints were closed down and the market women were able to move freely again. The following Sunday morning, at each of the Masses, I gave a brief account of what had taken place the previous Sunday evening, and asked the people would it not be possible to carry out the same type of approach to other problems within the community. I called for a meeting of all "Concerned Citizens" for the following evening. About thirty people turned up. We started the meeting with biblical readings based on "Bible and Justice" and how, as Christians, we are called by our Baptism to become socially active? I then put before the group three questions: ***"What are the problems that we see in the community a present? Who or what are the causes of these problems? What can we do as Christians to work together to bring about change?"***

A lively discussion followed and many problems and suggestions came forward. I then asked ***"Who is hurting right now because of a problem or injustice done to them or their family?"*** Plenty of responses. ***"Can we as a group take up one of the injustices named at present and tackle it?"*** Again many responses and suggestions. Finally one injustice was selected and a methodology worked out to tackle the problem. The problem selected was an injustice to a student who had been charged at school for an exam result that he should have received without payment. We went as a group to meet the principal who told us in no uncertain terms that he made the rules for the school and what went on in the school was his own business. We asked him if this was in line with government policy. He replied that he did not follow government policy. We left him and then went to the Inspector of Schools. Time does not allow me to elaborate more fully on this or subsequent projects undertaken by the group. Suffice it to say that the student was eventually refunded the money and the people began to get the self-confidence that they needed to tackle other areas of injustice within their community.

As a group, we met on a monthly basis. Gradually, we realized that we would need a wider base to work from. We then invited other Christian churches and Muslims to our meetings

so that all sections of the community would be involved in the struggle for Justice. All of the Christian Churches and the Muslim community sent representatives to the subsequent meetings. We started each meeting with a reading from the Bible and the Koran and also introduced the group to the social teachings of the Church. We strongly stressed that we were not a political group but religious people trying to live out our commitment to the gospel of Jesus and the teachings of Mohammed. Each meeting was doomed a failure if we did not tackle one concrete issue of injustice within the community. Many examples of injustice emerged - overcharging by doctors at the government hospital, corruption of lawyers, rigging of weighing scales for the measurement of farmer's produce, "**ghost workers**", non payment of salaries etc. As the group became stronger and more well known, not without its inner and outer struggles and tensions, many other areas in the country asked us to give them workshops on how to start such a group within their own communities. By this time, we had an executive body, which included a lawyer, to help run the organization now called "**The Concerned Citizen's Action Group**". Miserior of Germany paid for the running of the office and travel expenses incurred in running workshops etc. The other regional groups had to find their own funding. Most of the priests and religious in the three Dioceses as well as the Bishops, were actively promoting the work of the group. The groups were growing from strength to strength when the tragedy of the Liberian situation spilled over into Sierra Leone and has greatly inhibited the work of the Concerned Citizen's Action Groups. Their original headquarters has been totally overrun by the rebels and now they are coordinating the activities from a new base but in a very difficult, politically unstable climate.

So, what does all this say to us as missionaries? The Malawi Bishops in their Pastoral letter stated "**When the Church speaks out about the promotion of Justice in human society or when she urges the lay faithful to work in this sphere according to their vocation, she is not going beyond her mission.**" (*Instruction on Christian Freedom and Liberation, 1991, No 63*). The Church is an institution in society and

therefore has the right to speak and act for the betterment of that society. As Julius Nyerere so rightly pointed out: ***"Unless we participate actively in the rebellion against those social structures and economic organizations which condemn people to poverty, humiliation and degradation, the Church will become irrelevant to people and the Christian religion will degenerate into a set of superstitions accepted by the fearful"*** (Julius Nyerere, *Man and Development*, 1974, p 85).

When the Church first came to Africa, it looked at the needs of the people and tried to respond to these, taking into account the material, social and spiritual dimension of their lives. Many hospitals, schools, universities, development programmes, catechetical programmes were started. For hundreds of years the Church flourished and established itself as the ***"leaven in society"*** and the ***"light to the world"***. Now the political and economical situation has changed and the Church in order to continue on its good work must address itself to the present situation and concerns of the African people. I believe that the Justice and Peace Programme is one way to continue the saving presence of Christ in the world in a concrete manner. The Church needs to support the new aspirations of the people to have a greater say in the running of their lives. The sudden upsurge of violence can in some way be attributed to the feeling of helplessness and powerlessness that people have been feeling for a long time in the face of dictatorial governments and manipulation from overseas by the Western countries.

What most African people are seeking is a ***"genuine democracy"*** in which leaders are servants of the people who elected them, and not their masters, in which leaders are answerable and accountable for their actions to those they lead, a true government of the people; not a government by or for the privileged few. What is at stake in all of this is nothing less than the search for a new form of society and true forms of freedoms, justice and peace. Initiatives taken by the Africans themselves very often need the support of the Church and especially missionaries, if they are not to be crushed by the

governments that fear any sort of democratic movements. One of the greatest obstacles to the process of democracy in Africa is the fear of retribution by government authorities. Sierra Leone has been ruled by military government for many years now - hence the initial fear of the people to partake in any democratic movements. This is why it was so important to stress the religious nature of the meetings and the subsequent actions that follow. African people are innately religious and have for the most part great respect for the work of the Catholic church and other religious bodies. Therefore many of the democratic movements can only flourish under the umbrella of the Church. If they do not get this support, they risk being torn apart by political forces and crushed by fearful governments. I firmly believe that the Church should give the support that these types of groups seek.

Jung once wrote "***different people inhabit different centuries***". Something in the African clock of development, of its own natural process, got smashed when Europe broke into the Continent. And when the colonialists pulled out, they left the economic, political and cultural infrastructure of Africa reconfigured in such a way that the new countries served Europe better than they served one another. The local rulers were pushed aside by the new colonial rule of government. The traditional rulers controlled their hearts and minds, while the new governments controlled the people externally. So, today, we have a fragmented people, a demoralized Africa.

What of the future? "***People should be the basis of development, it is the people who must structure their own society and continue from there***" (*Africa Faith & Justice Network, 1990, Position Paper No 27*). We, as Spiritans, have played our part in helping to establish the Church in Africa. Now it is up to the local Church in harmony with the missionary presence that is still in Africa, to work together to respond adequately to the new challenges facing the continent. The quotation from the Times painted a very bleak picture of Africa. Yes, there are major and serious problems. Yet at the same time I was amazed at the vibrancy and resilience of the people everywhere I went. They have a deep faith in the goodness of

God and His presence in their lives. They have a joy and inner strength that nothing seems to be able to quench. Can we not believe that a nation that has overcome slavery and colonization, will in time emerge democratic and free from its present chaos? We must play our part as Spiritans to continue to show to the people that God does hear the cry of His people.

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SEDOS

by William Jenkinson

Fr. W. Jenkinson, a member of the Irish Province, was ordained in 1952. His first appointment was to Kenya where he worked in Mombasa mainly as Education Secretary. He was recalled to Ireland in 1966 as Director of the House of Theology. In 1972, he was appointed Secretary of the Irish Missionary Union, a post he held until his nomination as Provincial of the Irish Province. From 1978 until 1980 he did pastoral ministry and pursued further studies at Berkley (California). He was appointed Executive Director of Sedos on his return to Europe and worked in that capacity for twelve years. He is currently Superior at the Generalate House, Rome.

This article attempts to describe SEDOS, to tell how it began and developed, who are its members and who it serves. It will indicate some characteristics of the organisation and suggest how these can be applied to comparable organisations. But first a word about how I came to be involved in it.

My sabbatical was drawing to a close at the end of 1979 when I received an offer of a posting as Executive Secretary to SEDOS. In the library of the Graduate Theological Union at Berkeley I had come across the challenging volume, **Mission Theology for our Times** which had been published by SEDOS following the Symposium held in 1970. I accepted the SEDOS offer with some diffidence and came to Rome. The post was for three years. I asked for a trial period of one year. It was granted. So I came for one year, possibly three, and stayed for twelve.

Beginnings

The acronym, **SEDOS**, stands for a "**SE**rvice of **DO**cumentation and **St**udies". It is equally applicable to the Italian, "**SE**rvizio di **DO**cumentazione e **St**udii". I once suggested to a member of our Executive Committee that it might be helpful if some reference to mission were added to this title. His reply was: "There is no need to put petrol after SHELL, nor mission after SEDOS. Everybody knows SEDOS is about mission!". This article, however, will still try to describe it to those who may not know what it is about.

SEDOS began modestly, and to some extent accidentally during the closing years of the Second Vatican Council in response to a deeply felt need. Following the Council's rejection of the document on mission, an informal group of Superiors General of missionary institutes and missiologists helped to draft a new document. This was basically the '**Ad Gentes**' which later received one of the highest votes of approval at the Council. The value of collaboration was not lost on the group; soon the leaders of seven institutes involved in mission established a permanent secretariat to facilitate their working together.¹ The Service of Documentation and Study on mission was launched. By 1970, membership grew to 30 institutes, to 42 in 1980, to 75 in 1990, and to 85 as of this year. Bearing in mind the scriptural warning against pride in census-taking and numbering, I give these numbers simply to indicate that SEDOS appears to respond to a continuing deeply-felt need.

The Why of Mission

SEDOS beginnings were marked by a time of extraordinary

¹ The moving spirit behind the initiative was Fr. Mondé, Superior General of the African Mission Society. Fr. Schötte, Superior General of the Divine Word Society provided the buildings for the secretariat. Fr. Benjamin Tonna, a diocesan priest from Malta was appointed the first Executive Secretary.

change. Not only was the Church changing, the world was being reshaped, as well, in ways that affected mission in particular. The colonial age was coming to an end; new nations were appearing; there were hopes of a new economic order uniting south and north; 'development' was the magic solution which would facilitate this new economic order. A world church was appearing and recognising the importance of racial, ethnic, cultural and linguistic diversity; the whole Church was missionary by its very nature; God's saving presence was being acknowledged in diverse peoples and the Church-'God's chosen people', would soon come to terms with the notion of "God's chosen peoples".

Momentous changes seemed to engulf the traditional missionary effort. SEDOS grappled with these new ideas and in 1970 organised a Symposium of Church leaders and missiologists. It was the report of this Symposium which had attracted my attention in the library of the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley. The volume contained the official conclusions of the Symposium: **"The Way of Mission"**. **"Why mission"** was the agenda underlying the Symposium. It focused on two central questions: the precise nature of non-Christian religions as roads to salvation and the place of development work in missionary activity.

The Future of Mission

In 1981, ten years after the first Symposium, SEDOS organised a major Research Seminar on **"The Future of Mission"**. The 100 participants were equally divided between professional missiologists and Superiors General of the SEDOS membership who would have the major responsibility for implementing the findings of the Seminar. These findings were published, significantly, under the title **"Dialogue in Mission"**.² Following lengthy and searching discussion the Seminar unanimously

² Lang Joseph, Motte Mary, *Dialogue in Mission*, New York, 1982 Eds, Orbis Books, pp. 688.

approved an ***Agenda for Future Planning, Study and Research on Mission***. It has been used extensively by Superiors General and their assistants as a resource document in their study of mission today and when visiting their personnel in mission situations. Fr. Gabriel Ferrari, then Superior General of the Xaverian Missionaries and President of SEDOS, wrote of it later: "I have attended two Bishops' Synods and other ecclesiastical meetings but none had the strength of that Seminar. The ideas which emerged from it may now be found disseminated in the constitutions of many missionary and non-missionary institutes..... Eight years after the Seminar, the intuitions that emerged there still prove valid".

To implement the Agenda drawn up by the Research Seminar, SEDOS initiated a programme of yearly week-long residential seminars on the Future of Mission. These became the centrepiece of a wide-ranging programme of consultations, special interest group meetings, one-day seminars and ad-hoc sessions on topical mission issues. Speakers at these seminars were invited on a world wide basis. They were renowned theologians and missiologists or ordinary missionaries, religious, priests, bishops and even archbishops; some were monks; some were lay people, married or single. They were committed to lives of dialogue, justice and inculturation of the Gospel, to bringing about the Reign of God whether to telling people about the God of love and the love of God, in universities, seminaries, city churches, schools, small 'bush' chapels, or in no chapels at all. They came to SEDOS willingly to share their resources and experiences.

New Trends in Mission

Extraordinary change again marked Church and world when in 1989 SEDOS celebrated its Silver Jubilee. The Berlin Wall had crumbled; a new world economic order was proving illusory; new nations had appeared but struggled ever more desperately to free themselves from economic strangleholds; ethnic rivalries divided peoples in the new nations; the context of mission had changed radically. "***Why mission?***" no longer

posed a serious question. New questions were surfacing: **"How mission?"; "Where is mission?" , "Who does mission today".**

On the occasion of its Silver Jubilee SEDOS decided to publish a selection of conferences held over the previous eight years. Edited by the then Director and Associate Director of SEDOS under the title: **"Trends in mission; toward the third millennium"**³, it was listed by the International Bulletin of Missionary Research as one of the 15 best books on mission in 1991.

Sample topics from these conferences indicate the range of mission interests addressed by SEDOS in those years:-'third world' theologies; popular religiosity; the challenge of modernity; the missionary outreach of Asian and African churches; the 'Rushdie' affair; Sufi prayer and contemplation in Islam; women in Islam; 'Jihad'; unmasking the idols of the West; prophetic mission in a changing world; building and decision-making in inter-cultural communities; 'lectio divina', the theological background to inculturation, etc...A wealth of mission experience and familiarity with changing situations in mission was a characteristic of these sessions.

Organisation

SEDOS Secretariat is the organisational center behind the SEDOS activities. It is responsible to the Executive Committee which, in turn, reports to the General Assembly. This ensures a clear line of responsibility. Situated in ample offices donated by the Society of the Divine Word in the grounds of their Generalate in Rome, the Secretariat houses a considerable collection of periodicals and books on mission today. A computerised index of key-words facilitates access to information in the collection. SEDOS BULLETIN, now in its 24th year,

³ Jenkinson William, O'Sullivan Helene, ***Trends in mission; toward the third millennium***. New York, 1991, Orbis Books, pp 419.

is published monthly by the Secretariat; many Superiors General and missionaries refer to it as the best publication on mission that comes out of Rome. Published as a service to SEDOS members it is available also to the wider missionary readership.

The Secretariat hosts on-going meetings of groups concerned with topical issues such as Christian-Muslim dialogue etc...or the impact on mission of events in places like Haïti, Zaïre, Angola. The staff assists the Sedos leadership teams with rapid access to information on particular problems and frequently puts them in contact with other members having expertise and/or personnel in similar situations.

Some Characteristics of SEDOS

SEDOS' way of being has some characteristics which may be applicable to other similar organisations. Membership was open to women's congregations almost from the beginning. They formed about one-third of the membership for a number of years; they now are slightly more than half. The SEDOS Constitution rules that the organisation's President and Vice-President are alternately men and women Superiors General. Women make up half of the membership of the Executive Committee. It has been kept small in number and attendance at the meetings cannot be delegated.

SEDOS depends for 90% of its funding on the annual fees paid by members; this gives it a certain independence both in reflection and action. Over the years it has built up a strong family spirit in its network of people from different nationalities, cultures and languages. They share interests, problems, histories and experiences of mission. They are friends and in formal and informal gatherings feel free to ask difficult questions and share anxieties. They are supported, encouraged and enriched by others engaged in the same work of evangelization.

The organisation reaches out to South and North, East and West. On the occasion of its twenty-fifth anniversary in 1989

almost all its seventy-two members had their origins and by far the greater proportion of their membership in the Northern Hemisphere, yet it chose Michael Amaladoss SJ, from the Southern Hemisphere, to give the keynote address. His theme: **"Mission from Vatican II into the Coming Decade"** was presented, he said, by "a recipient of mission and from the underside". An extended version of his address forms Part IV of **Trends in Mission**. The present President of SEDOS, Sr. Patricia Stowers, Superior General of the Marist Missionary Sisters is Samoan. The Vice-President, Yves La Fontaine, Superior General of the Marianhill Missionaries, is Canadian. Other members of the Executive are from Zaïre, India, Italy, France, Ireland, Germany, and U.S.A. The present Executive Director is Walter van Holzen SVD from Switzerland.

Ecumenism is an important aspect of SEDOS activities. It maintains contact with the World Council of Churches in Geneva and has collaborated in their Commission for World Mission and Evangelization recent conferences in Melbourne and San Antonio.

Head-quarters in Rome is an undoubted advantage facilitating easy contact with the Vatican offices concerned with mission, promotion of Christian unity, dialogue with other religions, non believers, and cultures etc. But the advantages of collaboration would appear to be equally or proportionately valid for organisations having their headquarters in national or other international centres.

Collaborating, Networking, Covenanting,

The potential influence of collaborating, networking, and covenanting by any numerically large organisation hardly needs emphasis today. Total membership of the institutes in SEDOS amounts to approximately a quarter of a million. They may be largely unaware of SEDOS (in spite of the comparison with SHELL!), but their leadership is closely concerned with SEDOS thinking. The Mission Secretary of a major Society once informed me that the SEDOS Seminar on Justice and

Evangelization had a direct effect on their Chapter decisions on that theme.

The three recent past Presidents of SEDOS made significant statements about it on the occasion of the 25th anniversary in December, 1989.

"The outcome of the issues dealt with by SEDOS over the years 1983-85 when I was President helped my own Society to fulfil its missionary task in a more enlightened and committed way. From the steadily growing membership, among other signs, I dare to conclude that the same may be said of the other institutes who are members of SEDOS". (Henry Heekeren, Superior General of the Society of the Divine Word).

"There is no doubt in my mind that when I was President from 1986-88, SEDOS chose seminars responding to certain signs of the times which were important and significant to the mission of the Church and the missionary institutes...I believe that the SEDOS sessions were steps in keeping alive the experience of Vatican II in a journey of self understanding and renewal". (Helen McLaughlin, Superior General of the Religious of the Sacred Heart).

"I was just back from Africa, in 1981, and still enthusiastic about my work there. The contact in SEDOS with missionaries, men and women, from all continents opened my eyes and helped me re-read my missionary experience. I was thus set on a renewal path of profound sharing that is still going on". (Francesco Pierli, Superior General of the Comboni Missionaries and SEDOS President from 1989-1992).

A suggestion

The Irish Holy Ghost Congregation (Spiritans) recent Preparatory Report for their 1994 Provincial Chapter makes an observation which could apply to many religious institutes involved in mission today. Spelling out new rôles for missionaries

along the lines indicated in Pope John Paul II's encyclical ***Redemptoris Missio*** the Report notes that nearly all Irish missionary institutes today are engaged in the process of 'ending' or 'disengagement' but these 'endings' have been accompanied by new 'beginnings' or new ways of being missionary". It then adds, "***Mission today invites us to greater collaboration with other Congregations and with laity***" and asks whether the Province should not have greater openness to participation in international groups?

The unchanging Good News of Jesus Christ has to be proclaimed to a changing world. The potential has barely been touched for collaborating networking, and covenanting in proclaiming this Good News to a changing world where situations of mission are constantly evolving. Principles of collaboration which inspired the seven founding members of SEDOS are as valid today as in 1964. Their implementation has challenged the organisation over the years. Missionary religious institutes at national and international level anywhere could possibly learn from it.

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ON SPIRITAN EDUCATION

by Henry Koren

*Fr. Koren is one of the Congregation's best historian. Born in Nederland, he began his teaching career in Trinidad in 1941. Since 1948, he taught Philosophy in the U.S.A., at Duquesne University, Pittsburgh and at Saint Leo College in Florida. Fr. Koren has written several books about Spiritan history: **The Spiritans**, Pittsburgh, 1958; **Knives or Knights?** A history of the Spiritan missionaries in Acadia and North America, 1732-1839, Pittsburgh, 1962, (also published in French); **To The Ends of the Earth**. A general history of the Congregation of the Holy Ghost, Pittsburgh, 1983, (also published in French); **A Spiritan who was in North America and Trinidad, 1732-1981**, Pittsburgh, 1983; **The Serpent and the Dove**. A history of the Congregation of the Holy Ghost in the United States, 1745-1984, Pittsburgh, 1985; **Essays on the Spiritan Charism and on Spiritan History**, Bethel Park, 1990; and, presently, **Spiritans East Africa Memorial, 1863-1993**, Bethel Park, 1994. Since 1989, Fr Koren is archivist at the Provincialate of the USA East at Bethel Park.*

Spiritans Rule and education

The Spiritan Rule of Life speaks about formation and education in Chapter Two, N°s 13 to 18, in the context of the Congregation's mission in the church. This mission is viewed as one of service and liberation, dialogue and inculturation (13.1), as the defense of the weak against oppressors (14); it calls on us to analyze the structural causes of oppression (14.1), to discern prophetic voices and develop new apostolic initiatives (14.2); it speaks of the fruitful encounter of local culture and religious traditions with Gospel values (16.1); it calls on us to understand people's ways and customs, to respect their human experience in all its depth (16.2), to engage in honest dialogue with other religions and even with atheists

(16.3) and to help remove the scandal of a divided Christianity (17).

The chapter goes on to speak about the Spiritan mission in the Church as including the education and formation of a committed and responsible laity, of future priests and religious for ministry and, in general, involvement in the social and educational work as desperately needed by the young in our time (18).

I intentionally avoid here the term "training" used in the English version of the Rule. The original sense of training refers to taming and drilling animals -- the word comes from the Latin **trahere**, to drag along. But this connotation of dragging someone along can easily still play a role more or less subconsciously. Confer the old American novitiate system of drilling the young into a kind of mindless performance of practices rather than helping them internalize religious life. I do not have the official French text of the Rule, but suspect that it uses the word "formation".

Undoubtedly, what Chapter Two says here is also what Poullart des Places had in mind when he said that "a priest who is zealous but ignorant is blind in his zeal"; he would be like a blind man trying to lead the blind.

Looking at all this intently, however, one feels inclined to make his own the exclamation of **The Following of Christ**: "Good Lord, this is no child's play or a one day task!" Did the authors of the Rule really know what they were saying? The mind reels when it thinks of all that being-a-Spiritan implies in the line of education. Let me give a few examples.

Dialogue

To engage honestly and fruitfully in a dialogue, I must really, not just verbally, drop my assumption that I am right or at least have the better answers, I must renege my assumed claim that I am, as Merleau-Ponty expresses it, one of "those who know"

and sit down at the feet of my interlocutor to **learn** from him. And if I'm not to be bowled over by him into uncritically accepting his words, I must have a profound and lived understanding of what I call my way of thinking. That is, if our dialogue is of a religious nature, I must be well versed in my "lived" theology and still retain an openness of mind that would make a Grand Inquisitor shiver with self-righteous horror while he condemns me to the stake.

If our dialogue turns to culture -- any religion contains cultural elements -- I must not only be deeply rooted in my culture and understand the reasons behind that culture's values, but also realize that there are at least as many cultures as there are social groups and I must **really** be willing to consider the others' culture just as good as mine. And even if I say that I'm willing to do so but add "unless of course that culture goes against God's law" in some respects, I am not safe. One can hardly escape the thought that this "unless" has, historically speaking, always been the great source of trouble as Jews, Christians, Moslems and many others have always tried to bolster their cultural values with an appeal to God's law to give them a divine guarantee. And if all are right, God seems to have spoken with "a forked tongue".

Let me illustrate the matter by recalling a dialogue of an upper class philosophy student with his professor. After listening to this scholar's presentation of some classical philosophers' views, the student exclaimed: ***"When you expounded Plato's view, I opted for Plato; when I listened to Descartes' theory, I was ready to swear allegiance to him; when Kant hit the scene, I fell in line behind him; revolting as Nietzsche sounded, I'd have liked to 'philosophize with a hammer' in his company; my father is a capitalist, I was ready to join ranks with the proletarians behind Marx, although I had more to lose than my chains -- a large inheritance. But when you tackled them one by one over the weeks, their 'solid' foundations began to shake and I became convinced that***

you are right. My question now is: Who is coming next and will demolish you? Can I ever know which answer is really true?"

"The professor answered: "Now at last you are ready to begin to think and to search for the truth. But you should realize that all human research is only a groping for answers that never fully lead to absolutes beyond new questions. And do not think that you can find refuge from further questioning in any other discipline. Not even in physical science do you find ultimate answers to physical problems; their answers also always end with an 'ultimate' fact."

"The scientist will answer: "That's as far as we have been able to go till now. The search is never over." So it is a fact that all our answers are always subject to further refinement and further progress. Note that I, too, am now hiding behind a fact, a provisionally ultimate fact. But no one can hold us responsible for not having seen what is as yet invisible".

Structural oppression

In this way one could go on with respect to all the other points listed in Chapter Two of the Spiritan Rule of Life. For example, consider liberation from structural oppression, the oppression embodied in the written or unwritten laws of a group. Structural oppression exists in any group that follows some rules of behavior.

One finds structural oppression even on a purely animal level in the pecking order of chickens and in the hunting hierarchy of a wolf-pack or a pride of lions. Among some primitive Indians the chief "owns" all women and grants access to one by the other tribes-men at his discretion, so that the very structure of the group amounts to oppression of the others in this respect. And when a human group lays down the law that one may not kill others at his discretion, this law oppresses his freedom to

express his hunting skill, blood lust or whatever one may wish to call it. In this way one could go on with all kinds of other restrictions on human behavior. Even if most people call some restraints certainly justified, these nonetheless are oppressive for those whose freedom is thereby restricted.

Nowadays when we speak of structural oppression we think primarily of economic and political structures that disregard the rights of the disadvantaged. Multinationals, for example, are descried as prime offenders in this matter, as well as the power structures of governments. But not every expert is convinced that multinationals are as blameworthy as left-of-center papers claim. One cannot simply put his trust in the experts on the left nor in the captive in-house experts in the pay of multinationals. Are there experts who are truly disinterested in every respect? And who are these experts? Who decides who are these experts? Is it to be done by acclamation or the ballot of the populace? Wouldn't the one who should shouts loudest win? And so on. Yet, if we are not to fight blindly against structural oppression in a concrete situation, we have to make up our minds as to which situation is oppressive.

One could point out that the best among the experts decide which situation is structurally oppressive and define "the best" as those who have the greatest concern and love for their fellow human beings. But, one assumes here that "the best" are not only great lovers of other people but also the best informed about what concretely is a more loving approach to the problem. Even the best can cause disasters by their ignorance. A St. Charles Borromeo, in his loving concern for the people of Milan who were stricken by the plague, called all together for several days of prayer in his cathedral to obtain the end of the plague. Among the densely packed mass of people in the church, the plague reproduced itself enormously. He caused a disaster, motivated by love, because he was ignorant of the exact cause of the plague. If there had been any public health

laws at that time, he would have gotten the death penalty for cruelty.

It can happen that, no matter what one does, one still falls short of the desired goal to do away with evils that prevent people from being truly free. Consider this case. Here is a country with a fruitful soil and a benign climate, but its people live from day to day with rarely a care for what tomorrow will bring. They find it easier to ask for surplus food from abroad than to take steps to produce their own. For years famine has been prevented by charitable donations from rich countries, which have often asked that nation to become self-sufficient. Finally, these countries tell that careless people: "Starting next year we will donate each year 10% less food to you; you must learn to stand on your own feet. In ten years we will stop giving you anything at all. But their only response is apathy.

In a few years famine begins to make many victims in that indolent nation; tens of thousands die of starvation. How cruel can those rich countries be, its leaders now exclaim in self-exculpation. But is it cruelty or can it be love that leads nations to assume such an attitude? No rich nation on earth can guarantee forever that it will have surplus food to help all who are in need. Shouldn't the available supplies go by preference to those who truly are stricken by disasters or truly unable to produce all the necessary food for themselves? It is not easy to have sit in judgment when no matter what one decides the results will mean starvation in some parts of the world. Yet if we are to be champions of the oppressed, we better keep such questions in mind.

Discerning Prophetic Voices

Similar difficulties are met when one has to discern prophetic voices. We must have a criterion by which we can separate the chaff from the wheat, authentically prophetic voices from false

prophets. Where do we get it? Is listening to the teaching authority of a church or other curial agencies always such a criterion? One need not be an expert in church history -- the history of any church or religious group -- to realize how often fallible human beings have vested themselves in authoritative speech to bolster views subsequently judged to have been erroneous.

A few examples may suffice. One finds acceptance of slavery, of relegating women to be second rank creatures, the condemnation of marital relations without an explicit intention of producing off-spring, the prohibition of interest on loans of money, the children's obligation to live by vows made by parents in their name, the rejection of vaccination and even of artificial incubators for chickens, of the social dimension hidden in the private ownership of mass production machines, etc.

In our own Congregation we find an example in Nigeria when Bp. Shannon was told he could not oppose slavery by creating a cultural climate in which slavery would be rejected by the people; instead, he should spend anti-slavery gifts exclusively for ransoming slaves. The bishop's voice was surely prophetic, but not that of Propaganda Fide in this case. Then, we can cite the opposition of some bishops and clergy which our Fathers experienced when they tried to open churches for the Blacks in the U.S.A.; likewise the mistrust toward American Spiritans by their own generalate when they wanted a mission of their own in Africa. More recent examples showing how difficult it is to be a prophet and start new apostolic initiatives can be found in Fr. Vincent Donovan's attempt to approach the Masai in Tanzania within the context of their own culture (cf. his book, **Christianity Rediscovered**); also in the experiences of the Dutch and American Spiritans in their evangelization of another semi-nomadic group in Ethiopia.

Disconcerting as it seems, there is no absolute criterion to help

us when we try to discern the voice of the Spirit. There is much truth in Merleau-Ponty's dictum that I have nothing else to guide me than my own opinions. While waiting for experience and experiments to help us, we can only grope our way and try to see the path leading to what is still largely invisible.

Dialogue with Atheists

To enter honestly into a dialogue with atheists, I must be willing to envision that the atheist may be not only just as sincere in his unbelief as I am in my belief, but also able to back his viewpoint with an impressive array of arguments that are not merely pseudo-arguments. And if our dialogue is not to end abruptly by my subscribing to his view, I had better know what is implied in being a believer in God on the one hand, or only a believer in man, on the other. I must realize the strengths and the weakness of both positions.

Nietzsche himself got frightened when he considered all that would be lost if belief in God were to vanish from the earth, and in his despair he called God back -- in vain. The authentic believer in God could get frightened if he considers the evil that belief in God -- some forms of it -- have inflicted on mankind and be grateful for the good that belief in man alone concretely has contributed to human history. Both the believer and the unbeliever are on shaky grounds of their positions are to be viewed from a purely intellectual standpoint. We have no apodictic proofs for God's existence -- I'd not even accept a god whose existence is established by "scientific" proofs -- and the atheist likewise cannot positively disprove God.

Is, then, believing or unbelieving just a matter of an option? Yes and No -- an option is involved, of course. The largest religious statistics show that atheism is percentage-wise the fastest growing option among all world-views as well as e.g., that Catholicism increased nearly 400% since the beginning of this

century. The option for or against, however need not be blind. There are pointers, no more and no less, in either direction, but which pointers I decide to listen to do not result from the "accuracy" of the pointers alone, but also from others factors, from my openness to acceptance of the pointers in the light of what it means to me concretely to be a believer or an unbeliever.

If you feel like shaking in your boots, you should if you believe that the Western development of the intellect into sheer rationality is what a human intellect ought to be. Didn't Pascal remind us that "the heart has reasons which reason does not understand?" Oh, yes, we can still repeat in all sincerity and with conviction "I believe in God the Father", etc.

Devoted to Education

If we are to provide a proper formation and education to committed and responsible lay-people, to ministers, missionaries and religious, if today's youth is crying out more and more for our educational and social work, we should know how to accomplish this concretely. Libermann would answer, of course, that experience will be our guide.

The trouble is that getting the necessary experience is not as easy as it may seem. Millions of people had experienced falling objects, but none of them could make much sense of that experience until Newton got hit on the head by a falling apple and formulated the laws of gravity. Experience cannot lead to understanding unless we know what is important, and this we cannot know unless we have relevant experience. A seemingly vicious circle, from which we can only escape by a long and tedious process of false starts, disappointed hopes and wasted efforts before light at last begins to dawn.

We must realize that our formative and educational endeavors

are without ultimate guarantees of success. On the other hand, we have an absolute guarantee of failure if we do not even try. So, we must engage in them to the best of our ability without any hard and fast rules, ready to change our course if and when we notice that we are on the wrong track.

"To the best of our ability" will mean with the greatest expertise possible in our era. Since every active Spiritan is in one way or another involved in formation or education, everyone of them must acquire expertise in some field in keeping with his concrete situation in life and his capacity. And he should keep up with new developments in his field, lest he become blind in his zeal. For if the blind lead the blind, both will fall into the pit.

Are any categories of expertise excluded as irrelevant to our purpose? One might say, for example, that mathematics and physical science are not in line with our apostolate; they have nothing to do with "the poor and the oppressed". But, in principle, no expertise can be discarded "a priori" because we do not know beforehand what kind of expertise will be relevant. This point is illustrated in the Essays on the Spiritan charism by the story about the Greek king and his rejection of the irrelevant "electron" with respect to fast communications.

Remember also the attitude of our founder in this matter. He lived in an era in which mathematics and physical science still played only a minor role in the human world. Yet what were the prerequisites he demanded for admission to theological formation? No one could begin theology without having studied the new physical science and its prerequisite mathematics. How serious that demand was taken is evident from the public disputation at the end of the philosophy studies in 1708: the two Spiritan candidates chosen to defend 40 theses in it chose three-fourths of them in the field of general and special physics.

Today there is far more reason to insist on science as a

requisite for theological studies. Physical science and mathematics permeate every aspect of life in today's developed world, and the less developed world is fast trying to catch up to prevent being doomed to a life of poverty. Don't we need experts in this field? Can even theology be pursued as it ought to be without a dialogue with science? Interestingly, one can notice today that scientists, such as Heisenberg, can write meaningfully about theological questions and be listened to by expert theologians, even as some theologians can write about certain aspects of physical science in a way that makes scientists take notice as relevant to their pursuits.

The minimum should be that we possess at least a kind of "learned ignorance", i.e., we know enough about science not to venture onto thin ice by basing ourselves on scientific notions of the past, on which a good deal of medieval and even later theological lore relied; e.g. how the world was created, how life came about, how moral norms arose and developed, how the presence of Christ in the Eucharist should be understood. Obviously, such questions need to be reexamined again and again as progress in the sciences causes explicit or tacit assumptions to be discredited.

Should we do more than this bare minimum? Our educational mission to form lay-leaders, priests and religious demands more than minimalism. It stands to reason that, as one of the larger religious institutes in the Church, we need true experts not only in the world of physical science but in many other domains of knowledge that are relevant to the world in which we and they have to live and preach the gospel, for it is the world in which the people of God must be able to give a Christian meaning to their environment.

How could we as a group, a Congregation, get the young (and the old) to respect us as their guides and leaders if the image we present to them is one of narrow-minded limitation to so-

called "strictly-spiritual" concerns or strictly institutional church affairs? The church should not be anywhere a kind of heavenly colony, a self-sealed unit, implanted into an alien universe of secular meanings. If it is such, it will be foreign to the world people really live in; and therefore it will perish as the "heavenly colonies" of Roman Christianity in North Africa with some 800 bishops have perished. Islam laid hold of these areas where the local people had not been given a chance to internalize the religion of those Roman colonies. (Interestingly, Christianity managed to maintain itself in parts of Egypt and in Ethiopia, where it had really become rooted in and as the people's religion.)

Not everyone can be expert in everything that constitutes the universe of meaning constituted by today's world; no one can any longer be that kind of an expert. (Only in the Middle Ages could it be said of St. Albert the Great that he was such an expert: "You know all that can be known".) There are many sub-worlds in the total world--the world of the East, of the West, of Africa, etc. And each of these worlds is subdivided again into, say, the Nigerian world, the Ibo world, the Masai world, the Brazilian world and its subdivisions of the Amazonian world, the Indian world in its tropical rain-forest, where one also finds the world of the caboclos, the rubber tappers.

Each one, however, should become an expert at least with respect to the world in which he lives and works, while also understanding the so-called "universals" of the human world, i.e., those values that appear meaningful to all people regardless of their particular little world. One of these universals is science as possible liberation from preventable physical evil, another is Christianity as liberation from man-made oppression.

In addition, we should have some experts with broad horizons, who can keep others informed of new vistas they or other experts have discovered and who are also able to enlighten

them about provisional syntheses. Otherwise, the men in the field get bogged down and lose sight of the overall integrating picture that is needed if we are not to be thrown off balance.

How do we get such experts? As Libermann already pointed out in his time, it is not likely that they will come in significant numbers from the ranks of the workers in the field. Our experience shows that we have a dire need of more formators and educators. Yet, strange as it seems, candidates who show aptitude and desire for such a vocation can and do meet with but little encouragement and even downright rejection. What we need is a clear and unambiguous policy statement from the highest authorities in the Congregation that such vocations are welcome and will be respected rather than declared marginalized people. As was pointed out in the Essays, such a statement would merely confirm the position which Fr. Libermann explicitly took in their regard.

Nothing has been said here about what is meant by Catholic education as such, and more specifically about Catholic University education. Such issues are so enormously complex that they cannot be reduced to a few pages. Let me just mention that around 1980, when trying to answer the question as to what a Catholic University is, the faculty of one concluded that a vast array of studies would be needed before they could formulate an answer. Since then they have produced more than a dozen books approaching the various angles of the question. And a reading of some of these books convinced me that their hesitation was well justified.

Nothing has been said here either about what education is as distinct from mere drilling and training. That, too, is a complex issue. Just a few words may be said to indicate what seems to belong to the very essence of education. Any educational situation is an encounter of human subjects, of an educator and the one to be educated, regarding the meaning to be given

to the world. These two subjects, however, are not equal with respect to the task: one of them knows meanings which the other does not know but is desirous of learning about. Because he is dealing with a human subject, the educator must always remain full of reverence for the person to be educated; he may only provide him with an opportunity to make a responsible choice. The one who is being educated is full of trust that the educator he is encountering will truly help him to find his way. He is even willing to let himself be guided blindly for some time, for he trusts that thereby he will sooner or later be able to internalize, make his own, the meanings of the world spoken of by the educator. Thus, authentic love in the form of reverence and trust constitute fundamental features of true education.

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LIBERMANN'S TIME IN RENNES

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The Rennes experience, 1837-1839

"The whole time I spent with the Congregation of Jesus and Mary at Rennes was for me a time of suffering and torment. This was not the reason that I left the struggling Congregation. One of the things that influenced me the most in leaving was that I regarded myself as completely worthless and incapable of doing anything for the glory of God. There I was, enclosed in a novitiate with three or four people around me, to whom I brought little or no spiritual benefit I would find it difficult to explain to you how this came to be, but I can assure you that this was the case. I spoke, I taught, I tried to inspire fervour but my words were dead, in my first year I was in a state of shock and alarm. I had just come from the Paris seminary, were the good Lord has blessed everything I did.

"In my second year I suffered even more. I recovered a little, however, from the despondency of my first year. I

¹ From the conference given at Bickley on 2 February 1994.

regained my courage and was ready to be crushed in this way under God's hand, all my life if necessary. Running the novitiate caused me such great suffering, that I would never have believed myself capable of supporting the like. But I can truly say that the greatest suffering of all was seeing myself useless in the Church of God. This was really the case, and not the work of my imagination... All that year I experienced a great inner frustration, with no hopes of escape and no consolation. On the contrary, everything seemed to get on my nerves and Fr Louis caused me a lot of suffering. That was the situation all last year." (Lettre à M. Carbon, Directeur du Séminaire Saint-Sulpice, Paris; Lyon, 15 décembre 1839. ND I, p. 674-676).

Development and growth in Libermann

Let me start by explaining how Libermann's came to be in Rennes. At the Sulpician house at Issy, Libermann met a Eudist candidate Guy Leray and made a great impression on him. So much so that when Leray went to Rennes in 1834 - 1835, the two continued to correspond with the result that the superior of Rennes, Fr. Louis de la Morinière, got to know of Libermann through censuring the letters that passed through his hands.

Of course Leray suggested that Louis take him on, perhaps as a brother. In fact Louis was looking for a novice master and when he spoke to Mollevaut, Francis' confessor at Issy, the former suggested Libermann and it was he who talked Libermann into going to the Eudists.

Was Libermann happy to go? Yes, in so far as he thought he was going to have promotion from assistant bursar to assistant novice master, in which job his talents as a spiritual director would have some official role.

No, he was not happy to go in so far as he felt that he was being got rid of. On 7 September 1837, six weeks after leaving Issy he wrote back to the Bursar, who had asked him to say something about Sulpician spirit. The request from Telles de la Poterie obviously touched a nerve for Francis wrote: "***I also***

would have liked to have spoken to you about the Sulpician spirit, but I have no time at the moment and it is not my job, having been found unworthy to be a son of M. Olier". (ND, I, p. 373)

We know from Fr Tisserant that certain professors were hostile to the Bands of Piety started and animated by Libermann, because they divided the community (ND, I, p.597). Fr. Letourneur names three of them, namely Frs. Gosselin, Manier and Icard, but he says there were more. (Cahier n° 7, p. 9)

Libermann himself never named his opponents, but he did comment that he did not like the way St Sulpice and La Solitude were being run. Let me quote: **"It is said that the spirit of Saint Sulpice is a spirit of simplicity, of loving openness, of gaiety. This is used as an excuse so that people think only of having a good time; they dissipate themselves, they live with an emptiness of spirit and heart. In this manner no true virtue is acquired, because the virtues can only be gained in interior silence and recollection and not in this emptiness of spirit. Novices come out of La Solitude more or less decided on how to live in the seminaries and the directors dissipate these very seminarians and prevent them making progress. A novitiate should be more fervent than that... It is at La Solitude that the Sulpicians should assume the true spirit of their vocation and I assure you that this spirit is much bigger and more perfect than the vast majority of Sulpicians themselves think." (ND, I, p. 385).** In view of such an opinion, probably voiced not for the first time, I think is very clear why Mollevaut thought it best Libermann should move on.

Was the move to Rennes a wise one? Probably not for someone with questionable health. Everything at Rennes as regards the novitiate was being set up for the first time. The accommodation was extremely basic. Small rooms that were little better than attics with wooden external walls. Fr. Louis, who might have been thought to have the best living conditions, had one table and a wooden box in the way of furniture. For light he used a candle stuck in a potato and in winter arranged to have straw spread on the floor; there was no

question of him having a fire. For breakfast he ate a piece of bread with a glass of water and for the other two meals he made do with a bowl of greasy soup, in which it was possible to stand a spoon upright.

Great problems and sanctification

In the neighbourhood, the Eudists were disliked and in the diocesan offices they were distrusted. Libermann put up with it, but it had a negative effect on him in the long run. A year later for example he tried to put off a generous naive student who wanted to come to Rennes. And that is fair enough. But there is a hint of persecution complex resulting in a lack of self-confidence in the letter written in December 1838. Judge for yourself. Libermann writes to M. de Goy: *"You give me as one of the reasons for coming here, the fact that I am here. My friend you must not rely on such a consideration. It is possible that if you come I might become an obstacle to your progress, and do you harm. Do not imagine that I am just trying to be humble. It is the truth I am telling you, for I am much poorer than you think."* He goes on: *"I must also tell you that you are painting yourself a finer picture of our poor little congregation than the facts justify. And if you come here you risk experiencing great problems. We are beginning to set ourselves up, as well you know, and consequently nothing is in order, as for example at the Sulpicians and Jesuits. Up to now we have no ecclesiastical house and we cannot yet undertake any parish missions. We are poor, little, ignored and even mistrusted, not only as a group but individually."*(LS II, p. 132).

Libermann goes on painting a depressing picture of the difficulties. *"We meet with difficulties in all that we try to do; everywhere we go we are treated as if we were just off the boat. We are without reputation, without protection and obliged in every matter to humble ourselves and to take the subservient role with those with whom we have any dealings, to accept pain, insult and injustice not only without complaint, but even in silence, like a poor man who is trampled on by a rich individual but does not speak from fear of being crushed completely. Difficulties everywhere,*

for all and sundry, internal and external, from men and from demons. All that I am telling you is literally true without a word of exaggeration." (LS II, p. 132-133)

Of course Libermann tried to keep calm and spiritualize the whole experience. I do not think he completely succeeded. Certain of his letters show not only a mystical vein but also a certain excessive exuberance, which may be a reaction to what is happening. He suggests that his correspondents think of themselves as victims of love.

For instance on 21 August 1837 Libermann writes to Mr. Carron, a Sulpician seminarian suffering at the time from a restricted blood flow to the brain: ***"May the peace and love of Our Lord fill your soul and make of it a victim of love for his Father. In this respect strip yourself more and more of what remains of the old creature, that can never be sacrificed and consecrated to the Father..."***

"Oh what a sacrificial victim that is. Jesus, living in us, in his sacrificial spirit, becomes in us a victim of love, always living, always existing before his heavenly Father, living in us and existing in his perfect sanctity, by the separation, the stripping, and the nudity in which he holds our soul in its relationship to every creature, and especially to itself..." (LS I, p.280-281).

The text, though full of marveleous insights, is practically impossible to translate, because like some of John's Gospel it goes round in circles. A month later in writing to Fr. Jules Cahier, a Sulpician director forced by a crippling illness to lay down his duties, Libermann's language is in some ways more under control. But he starts off in a harsh paradoxical way, relying on Cahier's holiness to ignore the tone in order to accept the high ideal put before him. To quote: ***"With my heart filled with joy I thank Our Lord for what he is pleased to do with you, in you and through you. I believe I can use this harsh language, which unspiritual men see as barbarous and cruel, instead of appearing sad and distressed in order to console you in the trial to which Our Good Lord Jesus submits you. To speak in that style to you would be a real***

lie. For how can I not rejoice in your illness when I see how Jesus is happy in your soul, which he draws to himself and puts in his earthly paradise, in order to reproduce a little bit of what his Father produced in him in his mortal life? He admits it to his table, feeds it with this heavenly and sanctifying food, with which he fed himself, when he lived among us!

"We begin by suffering patiently, slowly this disposition perfects itself. We finish, after some short time, by abandoning ourselves entirely to Our Lord Jesus to be a toy in his hands.

"Of course we feel the shock of pain when wounded, our flesh is even sometimes flawed, but deep in the depths of our being we belong to and are in God and for God and this terrible shock which formerly would have crippled us, cannot even enter our soul, because it is united to Our Lord who resides there. His throne is unshakable in the depth of our soul."
(LS I, 298-300).

Humiliating experience

All this is great in theory, but eventually Libermann was given the grace at our Lady's shrine at Fourvière never to be afraid of any difficulty. But that was not true of his years in Rennes. In fact it was there that he had his most humiliating experience, when he had a severe epileptic fit in front of the assembled community. Asked literally at the last moment to give a conference Francis said a few words, turned white, made a few grimaces and keeled over. So much for the terrible shock that cannot even enter our soul.

It is true that asking him to give a conference without preparation was very unfair. But Fr Louis, the Superior General and Novice Master of the Eudists, though a holy man in many ways, was not known for fairness or human consideration and Francis suffered enormously at the hands of this obstinate and impulsive priest.

After all Francis went to Rennes thinking he was going to be involved in the formation programme. Indeed he had spent three months in Rennes preparing himself for the job. Instead he ended up on probation as the last of the postulants and novices, though he was expected to give them the occasional conference.

Louis himself was the novice master, yet often he did not have the time to do the job, because of the excessive demands on his person as Superior General. The assistant novice master was a Fr. Lucas, who was ill with tuberculosis and was himself known for his lack of organization and inability to speak in public. By November it had become so clear that he was incapable of doing the job that he was made chaplain to some reformed prostitutes and Libermann was promoted to take on his work, not as novice master, but rather as spiritual director.

But that does not mean to say that Louis trusted Libermann and that distrust was picked up by some of the novices. Unfortunately, at the same time Louis left Libermann to do most of the work without supervising him or really helping him. The result was that Libermann's authority was undermined and he began to doubt his own talents, even his own salvation. He wrote at this time: ***"I assure you it is not good to be over others. There have been moments when I thought our good Lord and Master was going to abandon me and reject me. Continue to pray that it is not so, for I am not yet delivered from this worry...I confess to you however that with all that, the idea of being rejected from the house of our good Master makes me shudder. There is nothing to fear, dear friend, is there? I have taken the resolution not to think of it any longer and to let him do with me and in me what is his good pleasure. May Jesus alone reign! Death and obliteration to every creature and to me first of all."*** (LS I, p. 352-53).

Bit by bit, the novitiate community began to split. To cut a long story short. Two of the novices were invited to leave after their behavior had shown that they were not suited for the religious life and after they had shown complete lack of respect and obedience to Libermann. One of the novices who went back to his Bishop was Mr. de Brandt in whom Libermann had

placed great hope. Libermann always claimed that the devil had a lot to do with what went wrong. Maybe! But the man, de Brandt, had had a serious illness in 1835 and until his death he was capable of eccentric behavior. Reading some of Libermann's comments at the time it just seems as if de Brandt was not cut out for the religious life and that he cracked up under the pressure of the novitiate. For me, at least, some of what Libermann writes on 16 March smacks of exaggeration. I quote: de Brandt's ***"state of mind for more than three months has been frightening. Imagine the most dissipated, the most evil, the most wicked, the most proud and the most malicious seminarian and there you have the picture of this poor brother. His malice and wickedness are so great that I have never seen anything similar. I do not know what to do, for I can do nothing with him. He has a mortal hatred and a sovereign distrust for me. He keeps no rule, accepts no restriction on his activities, he thinks only of evil from morning to night. He busies himself during the spiritual exercises and the other exercises either with sleeping or laughing or making the others laugh by all sorts of jokes and strange goings-on. He often plays the same tricks and for the same reason in front of the Blessed Sacrament..."*** (ND I, p. 496-497).

I suspect that many novice masters would have sent such a candidate on his way very quickly. One can only wonder why Libermann put up with such a carry-on for four months. Part of the answer was that he was emotionally committed to de Brandt, whom he had brought with him from St-Sulpice. But another part of the answer is that he did not have the authority to send anyone away.

"How much was Libermann to blame for what went wrong?"

The Eudist Archives show that Mollevaut blamed him as did Roubillon, a Jesuit novice master. Perhaps the latter was not really objective, being related to Louis and getting all his information from him. Mollevaut's opinion is illuminating,

because he wrote on 25 August 1838 to Fr. Louis, ***"If you had run the novitiate, nothing undesirable would have taken place. Libermann has a thousand good qualities; I fear that he does not have that of government... Sanctity is not enough; above all firmness and prudence are needed."*** (Eudist Archives; Letourneur, *Cahiers Libermann*, Livret n°4, p. 111)

Libermann's excessive expectation

Perhaps the most revealing opinion comes in a letter from Fr. Galais to Francis himself in February 1841. ***"I think you pushed souls beyond their present state of grace - that is what prevented your ministry succeeding. You showed yourself too emotionally affected by their imperfections; from which state of affairs resulted a violent confrontation between them and you. This led to a lack of openness and an opposition whose effects could only be disastrous."*** (ND, II, p.396).

What Galais is getting at is a lack of moderation on the part of Francis. There is evidence for it. In particular he wanted to form the novices according to the 400 pages of the rule and constitutions written by St Jean Eudes 200 years before. A St John Eudes that had left the Oratorians when they had got involved in secondary education. That return to the sources was not accepted by the three priest members of the Congregation, who, surprise, surprise, were involved in secondary education. Fr. Louis seems to have been of the same mind, since he was constantly excusing the novices from their novitiate duties for pastoral work in the school next door.

No one would argue about St John's holiness, but it was of a type more to be admired than closely imitated in the early days of a re-foundation. St John was an outstanding man with an extraordinary gift of zeal. But you have to be careful extolling a superior who to save his community from the possibility of contagion by plague, lived outside of community: to be precise lived in a barrel in the middle of a field while he continued to look after the victims of the plague!

Libermann never had any doubts about putting him forward as a model to be imitated. No wonder then that he could claim: ***"I was a blind man during all the time of my stay in the Seminaries of Paris and Issy."*** (quoted by Letourneur, ***Cahiers Libermann, Livret 4, p. 106***). And we might add during his time in Rennes.

To be honest Libermann was willing at the time to take the blame for what went wrong. He wrote on 29 March 1838: ***"If Mr. de Brandt has failed and if it is by the faults he committed that he brought upon himself this trial (which I believe), these faults, which have been terribly punished, were committed by myself in the first place. He only inherited them from me, who was the true guilty party."*** (ND, I, p. 502)

Learning experience

Libermann was basically unhappy during the whole of his time in Rennes. By 25 October 1839 he was thinking about becoming involved in the Work for the Blacks and by 28 November he had decided to leave the Eudists, which he did in early December.

His time in Rennes can best be described as a learning experience. He was positively influenced by the apostolic doctrine of St John Eudes, that was based upon devotion to the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary. He experienced at first hand the difficulties of re-starting a religious society and took his first faltering steps in the difficult job of leading and organizing men as superior as well as animating them as a spiritual guide. In the latter respect he learnt he had to treat each one according to his temperament rather than to impose a uniform direction which was in line with his own ideal of sanctity. He also made much progress in his own spiritual life. Some experts would say that what he lived through in Rennes amounted to the dark night of the soul.

He himself imagined at one stage that he had done no good at all in Rennes, rather the opposite. But that was not the long-term view of the Eudists themselves. Their archives contain a declaration from the pen of Fr. Divet, one of his novices.

Let me quote it in conclusion, "**Libermann, though he was a novice and though he had only received the order of acolyte, was so filled with the Spirit of God that no one feared to entrust him with the direction of the Postulancy. Such was the extent of his virtue that all the Novices, among whom there were several priests with years of experience in the ministry (Poirier, Divet, Talabandon, Maignan) had the greatest confidence in him. They took great spiritual delight not only in individual counselling sessions in which he excelled in leading souls to perfection but also in his conferences, which were clear and full of elevated and orthodox teaching.**" (Eudist Archives. Notice Divet; Letourneur, *Cahiers Libermann*, livret 4, p. 172).

Needless to say, the Eudists never reproached Libermann for the mistakes he made in the beginning because he realized he had overstepped the mark and quickly got himself back onto an even keel. And as an historical footnote they never found anyone, with anything like the same talents to replace him in Rennes.

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LIBERMANN, HOMME APOSTOLIQUE

par Jean-Claude Pariat

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En 1952, la Congrégation fêtait le centenaire de la mort du Père Libermann. Cet anniversaire créa un nouvel élan d'intérêts pour notre tradition spiritaine dans l'Eglise et dans la Congrégation. Libermann est reconnu comme "Maître de Spiritualité" et comme "Restaurateur des missions d'Afrique".² Pierre Blanchard dit du P. Libermann qu'"il est un docteur des Missions."³

Nous connaissons l'ampleur de la littérature du P. Libermann. Les "Lettres spirituelles" et les "Ecrits spirituels" du "Maître en spiritualité" ont été largement diffusés. Mais les écrits "apostoliques" du "docteur des Missions" sont restés très souvent dans l'ombre. L'horizon des anniversaires de 2002 nous invite à mieux connaître Libermann, homme "enraciné

¹ De la conférence donnée le 2 février 1994 à la Maison Générale à Rome.

² **LE VÉNÉRABLE PÈRE LIBERMANN**, Supérieur Général de la Congrégation du Saint Esprit et du Saint Coeur de Marie. Paris, 1953, 72 pp.

³ Blanchard Pierre, **LE VÉNÉRABLE LIBERMANN, 1802-1852**. Paris, 1960, Desclée de Brouwer, Tome I, p. 8.

dans l'éternel et inscrit dans l'histoire".⁴ Le "directeur spirituel" est en genèse dans sa piété juive. L'écoute de Dieu et la providence de Dieu opèrent dans le vouloir et l'agir de Jacob. Le co-fondateur du Saint Coeur de Marie et l'apôtre des Noirs sont en genèse dans l'homme spirituel.

I. L'homme spirituel

Libermann est avant tout un homme qui "écoute". L'exhortation du Deutéronome: **"Ecoute, Israël: Yahvé notre Dieu est le seul Yahvé. Tu aimeras Yahvé de tout ton coeur de toute ton âme et de tout ton pouvoir. Que ces paroles que je te dicte aujourd'hui restent dans ton coeur!"** (Dt 6, 4-6), est inscrite dans son coeur. Sa piété juive lui apprend à écouter Dieu et les hommes. Sans cette écoute de Dieu, il n'y a ni croissance spirituelle, ni discernement spirituel. Peu de temps après son baptême Libermann commence à pratiquer l'accompagnement spirituel. Une seconde référence à la vie du peuple d'Israël est l'abandon à la providence de Dieu.

Libermann donne pleinement sa confiance à Dieu et compte sur sa providence. Dieu y pourvoira! Parole que Jacob garde dans son coeur probablement depuis son enfance. En automne 1831, M. Carbon, membre du Conseil du Séminaire de Saint Sulpice, avertit François Libermann que le diocèse de Paris lui supprime sa bourse d'étude et l'engage à quitter le séminaire. Libermann lui répond: **"Dieu, je l'espère, voudra bien pourvoir à mon sort."** (ND I, p. 159). Nous retrouvons l'abandon d'Abraham questionné par son fils Isaac: **"Voilà le feu et le bois, mais où est l'agneau pour l'holocauste?"** Abraham lui répond: **"C'est Dieu qui pourvoira à l'agneau pour l'holocauste, mon fils."** (Gn 22,7-8).

⁴ Ibid., p.8.

II. Le directeur spirituel

Sans cette écoute de Dieu et cet abandon à la providence de Dieu, Libermann serait ni directeur spirituel, ni "docteur des Missions". Il témoigne du temps qui lui fut nécessaire pour pratiquer avec sérénité les charismes que Dieu lui donne. En choisissant deux de ses lettres, distantes d'une dizaine d'années, 1838 et 1848, nous relevons la permanence de son service comme directeur spirituel et la croissance de sa sérénité. Dans cet intervalle, Libermann est devenu co-fondateur et Supérieur du Saint Coeur de Marie. Il nous écrit des textes de fondation dont le grand "Mémoire" de 1846.

"Notre Seigneur seul est notre Maître"

De 1838 à 1841, Libermann échange plusieurs lettres avec M. Paul Carron, séminariste à Saint-sulpice. Dès janvier 1841, l'Abbé Carron est secrétaire de l'Archevêque de Paris. Libermann a beaucoup d'estime pour M. Carron. Il l'accompagne dans le discernement de sa vocation. Il lui écrit de Rennes le 31 mars 1838. Après l'avoir exhorté, en ce temps de Carême, à l'esprit d'anéantissement, il lui parle de leur lecture de saint Jean de la Croix: ***Je crois que saint Jean de la Croix a en de très grandes lumières de Dieu, et tout ce qu'il dit est admirable. Mais je crois aussi que notre divin Maître est encore plus admirable, et ce qu'on apprend de lui plus beau, plus lumineux et plus sanctifiant pour nos âmes. Je crois même qu'il n'y a que lui qui puisse nous éclairer, se faire connaître à nos âmes, et nous faire connaître à nous-mêmes. Il est donc certain que ce n'est qu'en lui seul qu'il faut chercher notre lumière, notre sainteté et notre vie. Ne vous inquiétez donc de rien, mon très cher, allez à Jésus de toute votre âme, et ne cherchez rien hors de lui, Abandonnez-vous uniquement à lui.***

(LS I, p. 450-451).

Libermann dévoile son attachement à Jésus-Christ. Lui seul est le Maître de nos vies; son enseignement est sans comparaison à celui des saints. **Jésus est notre modèle; il faut que nous fassions en petit ce qu'il a fait en grand, ou plutôt, c'est son divin Esprit qui doit opérer en nous, en petit, ce qu'il opérait en grand dans l'humanité très sainte de notre Maître.** (LS I, p. 453-454).

Par l'Esprit Saint, Jésus opère sur notre vouloir et sur notre faire. Ses volontés doivent devenir nos volontés et son action, notre action. Les témoignages des hommes nous sont donnés comme des appels et des oeuvres du Christ; ils ne doivent pas nous maintenir attachés aux témoins même s'ils s'appellent Jean de la Croix, Pierre Olier, Jean Eudes, Poullart des Places ou Libermann. Leurs témoignages nous révèlent deux vérités inséparables de la vie du Christ: son vouloir et son action dépendent totalement de la grâce de Dieu.

Demander la grâce de connaître la volonté de Dieu et la recevoir ne suffisent pas pour devenir disciple du Christ. Le disciple doit apprendre à oeuvrer comme son Maître. L'agir apostolique demande un esprit de force que l'apôtre doit demander à Dieu. L'efficacité de sa vie apostolique en dépend.

Libermann n'a pas connu sa vocation missionnaire, puis la volonté de Dieu de s'y préparer. Il s'est laissé guider par la foi de la communauté juive de Saverne. Sur sa route, il est rejoint par le Messie. Le Christ ressuscité l'appelle. Désormais le "tout" de Dieu et le "rien" de l'homme guident ses propres pas avant que lui-même soit appelé à guider les pas des autres.

Ne cherchez jamais à vous instruire par les livres, écrit-il à M. Carron. Notre Seigneur seul est notre Maître; c'est lui qui veut nous instruire et nous faire connaître toutes les choses que nous devons savoir; c'est en lui qu'il faut chercher toute notre lumière...Si vous lisez des livres, que ce ne soit pas pour y chercher des règles de votre conduite...Dieu seul,

mon très cher, Dieu seul et toujours Dieu seul. (LS I, p. 456-57).

Dieu travaille sur notre vouloir et sur notre agir. Dans une lettre écrite à Madame Rémond le 7 mars 1848, il lui rappelle la nécessité de l'abandon à Dieu de qui dépend le vouloir et le faire. **Vous désirez avancer dans la voie de la sainteté; c'est lui qui vous donne ce désir, mais ce doit être lui aussi qui l'accomplisse. Saint Paul dit que Dieu donne le vouloir et le faire; nous ne pouvons rien vouloir dans l'ordre de la grâce par nous-mêmes. Dieu nous donne ce vouloir. Quand nous avons ce vouloir, nous ne pouvons pas en venir à l'exécution par nous: Dieu nous donne le faire. Tout ce que nous devons, c'est d'être fidèles à suivre la conduite de Dieu, à le laisser faire en nous ce que bon lui semble.** (ND X, p. 120-121; LS III, p. 601-602).

Libermann propose la même docilité envers Dieu qu'en 1838. **"Dieu est là qui opère en vous à la fois le vouloir et l'opération même, au profit de ses bienveillants desseins."** (Phi 2,13). Entre ces deux lettres, Libermann est devenu un homme apostolique. Sa proposition est plus sereine et plus claire. Lui-même reconnaît la transformation de sa vie. Lors de son séjour à Rome en 1846, il écrit au M. Ignace Schwindenhammer et lui parle de son passé: **Jamais je n'ai fait aucune oraison sur le vertus, pas même sur les vertus de Jésus et de Marie...Je sais bien que mon esprit a pris une certaine force, une certaine élévation et mon jugement de extension et de la rectitude; mais il est certain que c'est la grâce toute seule qui a créé ce qui n'était pas, qui a fortifié ce qui était faible et rectifié ce qui était défectueux.** (ND VIII, p. 203).

Pour dire que Dieu est tout et que nous pouvons ni vouloir, ni agir sans la grâce de Dieu, Libermann ne décrit plus une vision abjecte de l'homme. Et pourtant, la fondation du Saint Coeur de Marie avec l'ouverture de la Neuville en 1841 et l'envoi des

premiers missionnaires en 1843 ne l'ont pas épargné des soucis et des épreuves: obstacles et souffrances à cause de la mission des Deux Guinées et d'Haïti, mort tragique du P. Tisserand, etc...Cependant, Libermann reste confiant.

III. Le co-fondateur du Saint Coeur de Marie

Au cours de l'été 1838, Frédéric Le Vavas seur, alors séminariste à Saint Sulpice, passe ses vacances à Rennes auprès de Libermann. Ils se connaissaient depuis son arrivée à Issy, en automne 1836. Frédéric gagne Libermann à la cause des créoles Noirs de Bourbon. Le Vavas seur est habité par l'appel de la race Noir, leur évangélisation et leur conversion. Un autre séminariste l'écoute, Eugène Tisserand. Sa mère, native de l'île de saint Domingue, est créole. Leur mutuelle préoccupation pour l'émancipation des Noirs est soutenue par M. l'Abbé Desgenettes, curé de Notre Dame des Victoires, à Paris, et par les prières de l'Archiconfrérie du **Saint Coeur de Marie**. Le Vavas seur parle de son inspiration à M. Pinault, son directeur spirituel à Issy qui lui répond: "**Le seul moyen de faire oeuvre qui dure est de former une communauté de prêtres spécialement voués à cet apostolat.**" ⁵

Le 2 février 1839, l'Abbé Desgenettes fait prier, pour la première fois, les membres de l'Archiconfrérie à l'intention de ce nouvel apostolat auprès des Noirs. En accord avec Eugène Tisserand, et sur recommandation de M. Pinault, Le Vavas seur écrit à Libermann au début mars 1839:

Vous m'avez souvent entendu parler de l'état déplorable de

⁵ Mgr Le Roy, **LE PÈRE LE VAVASSEUR**. Ed. ARS Terres Créoles, Ste Clotilde, La Réunion, 1989, p 23; (NB: il manque une présentation de Mgr Le Roy, les références de la première édition en 1882 et le premier chapitre, "Le Pays d'Origine: L'île Bourbon ou de la Réunion).

la religion à Bourbon et dans les îles environnantes et du délaissement absolu où se trouvent les nègres, les affranchis et les pauvres de ces pays. Les nègres, qui forment plus de la moitié de la population, sont surtout dans un état d'ignorance, de misère et de corruption dont on ne peut guère se faire d'idée ici; il n'y a rien de plus bas sur la terre, de plus vil et de plus méprisable dans la pensée du monde. Et tant qu'il n'y aura pas de prêtres assez rempli de l'Esprit de Notre Seigneur pour descendre jusqu'à eux, se confondre et se faire une même chose avec eux, jamais personne ne songera à sauver leurs âmes; et comme leur liberté, (=leur future libération de l'esclavage), qu'on attend, ne changera pas leur misère morale, mais, au contraire, l'augmentera, il s'ensuivra qu'ils ne sortiront peut-être jamais de l'état où ils sont. Entreprendre l'instruction et le soin de cette partie du corps de Notre Seigneur (car le plus grand nombre est baptisé) c'est comme se jeter dans une mer sans fond de mépris, d'ignominie, de contradictions et de difficultés que l'enfer suscitera et que Dieu permettra dans sa bonté. Vous voyez donc quels hommes il faut pour une telle oeuvre: il les faut pleins de ce véritable esprit de Notre-Seigneur qui animait le P. Claver. Il faut des âmes qui puissent ne vivre que de croix de tous genres, extérieures et intérieures; qui sachent se tenir plus bas que les pauvres Noirs dans la pauvreté, le dénuement, l'opprobre et le mépris, afin de pouvoir de là leur prêcher Notre-Seigneur crucifié et leur faire comprendre tout ce qu'il y a de richesses et de gloire dans la bassesse et la misère où ils sont devant les hommes...

Vous voyez aussi que c'est l'oeuvre la plus sanctifiante que l'on puisse imaginer. Et même elle est telle qu'on ne peut y entrer et y persévérer seulement un jour que par des vues et des désirs sans limites de sainteté et de perfection. Mais

où trouver et où former de tels hommes...?⁶

Libermann répond à Le Vavas seur le 8 mars 1839: ***J'espère que Notre Seigneur réalisera le projet qu'il vous a inspiré pour sa très grande gloire. Poursuivez-le avec confiance et amour envers notre très adorable Seigneur Jésus. Il a de bons desseins sur le salut de ces pauvres âmes, abandonnées jusqu'à ce moment, et depuis si longtemps.***

Je vous conseille donc, mon très cher, d'entreprendre cette grande oeuvre et de vous y employer sérieusement. Ne comptez pas en cela sur vous ni sur vos industries; ne cherchez à persuader personne, ne forcez rien; mais laissez agir le Maître de la moisson: c'est à lui de choisir les ouvriers qu'il veut y envoyer. (ND I, p. 638).

Libermann, homme "inscrit dans l'histoire"

L'origine de la Société du Saint Coeur de Marie se situe dans un contexte anti-esclavagiste. En 1815, lors du Congrès de Vienne, le saint Siège chercha à faire adopter par l'assemblée une résolution collective contre l'esclavage. Dès 1825, la grande Bretagne ouvre un processus pour l'abolition de l'esclavage. Elle parvient à faire 3 traités avec la France pour l'affranchissement de l'esclavage dans leurs colonies (1831-1833-1845). Le 3 décembre 1838, le Pape Grégoire XVI signe la bulle "***In Supremo Apostolus***" dans laquelle il se prononce contre toute espèce de servitude ou de commerce d'hommes. ***"Nous enjoignons que nul n'ose à l'avenir vexer injustement les indiens, les nègres ou d'autres hommes...les réduire en esclavage ou exercer ce trafic inhumain."***

Le mouvement et l'action "***anti-esclavagiste***" touche la totalité de la race noire, courbée sous le poids de l'ignominie, du

⁶ Ibid., p. 24-25; édition originale, p 42-43.

malheur et de l'ignorance. Libermann voit les noirs selon sa foi. **"Ces hommes sont faits à l'image de Dieu comme les autres."**

Libermann connaît les efforts politiques accomplis pour l'abolition de l'esclavage. Il y voit le **"Temps de Dieu"** et son action providentielle. Dieu est à l'origine de ce mouvement universel **"pour secourir la race noire et pour la relever de son abaissement...Le temps du salut est enfin arrivé pour ces pauvres peuples"**.⁷ Les hébreux, esclaves en Egypte, ont attendu le temps de leur libération. Au temps favorable, Dieu les a libérés par Moïse. Maintenant, Libermann est à la tête d'une société missionnaire. Il l'organise pour que ses confrères soient utiles au salut des âmes et qu'ils soient des hommes de communautés.

IV. L'homme apostolique

Le second départ missionnaire (1845) se prépare. Libermann écoute des personnes qui éclairent son discernement sur le service missionnaire; parmi elles, M. l'Abbé Luquet. La fondation se développe. En 1846, il voyage en France, se rend à Rome et rédige le mémoire "sur les missions des Noirs".

Luquet et Libermann

En 1838, Luquet est au séminaire Saint Sulpice. Il se lie d'amitié avec Le Vavasseur qui l'intéresse à l'oeuvre des Noirs et le met en relation avec Libermann à Rennes. Luquet entre aux Missions Etrangères en 1841. Ordonné prêtre en 1842, il part

⁷ Coulon Paul, Brasseur Paule et leurs collaborateurs, **LIBERMANN, 1802-1852**. Une pensée et une mystique missionnaire. Paris, 1988, Cerf, 938 pp. Paul Coulon, L'EFFERVESCENTE ANNÉE 1846 ET LA GENÈSE DU GRAND "MÉMOIRE" DE LIBERMANN À LA PROPAGANDE, p. 231.

pour l'Inde et rejoint Mgr Bonnard, Préfet Apostolique de Pondichéry. Avec lui, il achève la préparation du Synode de Pondichéry. Luquet **"fit mettre l'accent, non plus sur les problèmes que posent les catéchistes, mais sur le clergé indigène qui seul pouvait apporter une solution valable aux difficultés des missionnaires de l'Inde."**⁸ Puis Mgr Bonnard l'envoie à Rome en mai 1844 pour présenter à l'approbation de la Propagande les **"Actes du Synode de Pondichéry"**. Rome demande à l'Abbé Luquet des informations et des explications sur le Synode. Le 9 avril 1845, Luquet remet à la Propagande un manuscrit de 213 pages: **"Eclaircissements sur le Synode de Pondichéry"**. La Propagande lui demande alors de rédiger un projet d'instruction sur le clergé indigène. Il écrit deux sections distinctes: la première sur l'épiscopat, son importance et son universalité; la seconde sur le véritable travail missionnaire. Son étude devient l'avant-projet de la future instruction **"Neminem Profecto"**. Le Pape Grégoire XVI travaille ce document, le modifie et l'approuve le 12 novembre 1845. La première partie **"montre que le Saint Siège s'est toujours préoccupé de promouvoir les clergés indigènes; l'autre partie donne des directives précises pour la formation d'un tel clergé."**⁹ L'Abbé Luquet envoie l'instruction au P. Libermann qui lui répond au début janvier 1846: **Cette instruction nous fortifie et nous encourage à persévérer dans la fondation de nos établissements en Guinée. Il nous faudra sans doute du temps pour en voir les heureux effets, mais au moins nous aurons lieu d'espérer que nous ferons quelque chose de stable et de permanent. Nous sommes sûrs désormais de ne pas marcher d'après nos propres inventions, nous suivons une marche tracée par le Saint-Siège. Dieu nous bénira.**

⁸ Ibid., p. 385.

⁹ Ibid., p. 393.

Maintenant je vais vous entretenir de nos affaires et vous prier de vous occuper de nous... (ND, Compléments, p. 68-69).

En ce début 1846, vingt membres appartiennent à la Congrégation du Saint Coeur de Marie. Neuf confrères sont en mission: le P. Laval, à Maurice; le P. Le Vasseur, à Bourbon; le P. Bessieux et le Fr Grégoire, au Gabon; Les Pères Arragon, Briot de la Mallerie et Lossédât, les Frères Pierre Mersy et Siméon Hugues et M. Warlop, minoré au Sénégal. Six confrères sont déjà décédés, cinq en Guinée et le P. Tisserand dans le naufrage du Papin au large du Maroc.

Le 13 janvier 1846, Libermann écrit à Dom Jean Salier, religieux à la Chartreuse de Turin, au sujet de la candidature de M. Davy, prêtre à Turin. Il lui pose deux questions: ce candidat peut-il être un homme de communauté? peut-il être utile au salut des âmes dans les Missions? Puis Libermann donne quelques informations sur le noviciat: ***Dans notre communauté, le bon Dieu nous bénit de plus en plus. Nous avons beaucoup de monde; nous sommes environ une trentaine d'ecclésiastiques ici, tant prêtres qu'étudiants et 7 frères; nous attendons encore quelques ecclésiastiques qui sont sur le point de venir...Rien ne nous manque. Notre Seigneur nous a montré dans la pratique la vérité de ce qu'il nous a recommandé dans le saint Evangile, de mettre notre confiance en lui et de ne pas nous inquiéter de notre nourriture et de nos vêtements.***

Vous savez que je n'ai rien; ceux qui sont venus avec moi n'avaient rien non plus, et cependant la Bonté divine nous a nourris et nous fournit encore tous les jours ce qui nous est nécessaire, quoique notre nombre soit augmenté considérablement. (ND VIII, p. 14-15).

Quelques semaines plus tard, Libermann écrit à la communauté de Gorée. Il les informe sur la mort du P. Tisserand et leur

donne des nouvelles de la Neuville: *Ici, tout va très bien; nous augmentons de plus en plus; bientôt nous n'aurons plus de place, ni pour les chambres, ni dans le réfectoire, ni à la chapelle dans les stalles...*

Je vais, au mois de mai, faire le voyage du Midi pour acheter une maison avec un terrain pour recevoir les Noirs et leur apprendre un métier. (ND VIII, p 24).

Sur les routes

La fondation des Missionnaires du Saint Coeur de Marie est jeune, 5 ans à peine. Elle est en pleine croissance. Pourtant Libermann va quitter la Neuville pour voyager pendant cinq mois Il confie la direction au P. Schwindenhammer.

Au début mai, Libermann se rend au Havre pour négocier la vente des navires de M. Briot. Il revient à Paris et commence un itinéraire qui le conduit de Strasbourg à Marseille en passant par plus d'une vingtaine de villes. Le P. Blanpin l'accompagne. Ils font une trentaine de visites d'évêques et de Grands Séminaires. Le 4 juillet, Libermann arrive à Rome et y séjourne jusqu'en fin août. De retour à Marseille, le premier septembre, ses visites le conduisent à Toulouse, Castres, Bordeaux, Nantes, Saint-Malo et Paris. Il rejoint la Neuville en fin septembre.

En son absence, ses confrères ont assuré les études et l'accueil des nouveaux candidats; ils ont acheté la maison des orphelines et ont commencé les tractations pour l'achat de Notre Dame du Gard.

Le mémoire de 1846

A Rome, toujours accompagné du P. Blanpin, Libermann rédige son mémoire. Dans une lettre qu'il écrit à M. l'Abbé Schwindenhammer le 28 juillet 1846, il lui donne son avis sur des

problèmes de la Neuville; puis il lui donne ses nouvelles: ***Samedi prochain, je ferai les commissions liturgiques. Je fus si accablé par le travail du mémoire de 36 énormes pages du plus grand in-folio, que je n'ai pu rien faire pendant tout ce temps. La bonne Mère m'a aidé bien sûrement, car j'ai fini et je ne suis pas malade...Maintenant que mon travail est fait, je vais me ménager beaucoup. Je ne le pouvais jusqu'avant hier.*** (ND VIII, p. 194).

Libermann intitule son travail: "***Mémoire sur les Missions des Noirs en Général et sur celle de la Guinée en particulier***". Après l'introduction, il développe trois parties.

Il expose d'abord la situation actuelle de la mission des Noirs. Le temps du salut est arrivé pour la population noire. Libermann réfute de nombreux préjugés contre les Noirs et les objections contre l'oeuvre du Saint Coeur de Marie en faveur des Noirs. L'expérience des premiers missionnaires dont cinq sont morts permet de mieux connaître les principales difficultés de la mission et les moyens de les surmonter.

Dans une seconde partie, Libermann montre la nécessité de construire une première organisation sur des bases locales solides et stables. Il s'agit de former des prêtres, des catéchistes, des enseignants, des agriculteurs et des artisans autochtones. Pour lui, la foi, la science et le travail font naître un nouveau type de civilisation. Là sont les fondements d'une église locale ayant la forme régulière des autres églises et ne dépendant plus des missionnaires. Ce travail missionnaire exige dès maintenant un chef de mission et une organisation locale. Il rappelle que l'Instruction récente, ***Neminem Profecto***, (novembre 1845) montre l'importance du caractère épiscopal pour le chef de la mission.

Le dernier tiers du mémoire est consacré à des propositions spéciales pour la Guinée. Libermann fait une lecture géographique, démographique et anthropologique de la

Nigritie. Puis il propose une délimitation des territoires de mission et l'établissement de l'épiscopat dans la mission de Guinée. Dans un premier temps Rome pourrait nommer un Vicaire Apostolique et les territoires missionnaires pourraient être divisés en cinq provicariats.

Libermann conclut son mémoire en résumant son contenu.

Ce mémoire est un texte fondateur de notre héritage spiritain. Libermann l'a donné comme charte missionnaire de la Société du Saint Coeur de Marie. Il convient de le connaître inscrit dans l'histoire des missions au XIX^e siècle. Mais ne contient-il aucun message pour aujourd'hui?

Libération de l'esclavage, mission de l'Eglise

Constatant, comme Le Vavas seur, l'immensité de cette mission en faveur des Noirs, Libermann pense que Dieu s'est choisi des missionnaires faibles et dépourvus de tout **"pour combattre des ennemis si formidables"**. Nous sommes **"des enfants pour vaincre des géants"**. Réminiscence de la mission de Mission auprès du Pharaon, des égyptiens et des hébreux; réminiscence de David en face de Goliath. Libermann est sûr que l'unique force des missionnaires du S.C.de Marie est Jésus-Christ. Ils veulent avant tout **"travailler efficacement à la gloire de Dieu et à l'exaltation de sa sainte église."**¹⁰

Libermann fait une lecture théologique non seulement de la mission de l'Eglise mais aussi des Noirs. Il écrit: **"Ces hommes, sont faits à l'image de Dieu, comme les autres; ils sont bons, et disposés à recevoir le trésor de la foi qu'ils ne**

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 232. (toutes les citations du Mémoire ont été prises dans Coulon, Brasseur, **LIBERMANN**. Source 4: "MÉMOIRE SUR LES MISSIONS DES NOIRS EN GÉNÉRAL ET SUR CELLE DE GUINÉE EN PARTICULIER présenté par Libermann le 15 août 1846 à la sacrée congrégation de la Propagande", p. 221-270).

connaissent pas...Dans les pays où ils devraient trouver les richesses et les consolations de la grâce, leurs âmes périclent de misère au milieu de l'abondance."¹¹

Parmi les grands récits de sa tradition, Israël fait mémoire de sa servitude en Egypte et de sa libération providentielle. Sur les fleuves de Babylone, Israël se souvient encore. L'année jubilaire est l'année de l'affranchissement des esclaves, (Loi de Sainteté dans le Lévitique 17-26; Lev 25,13). Rendus à la liberté, les anciens esclaves retrouvent leurs droits; ils ne sont plus la propriété d'un maître.

Dans cette mémoire juive, Libermann, Le Vavas seur, les missionnaires du S.C. de Marie sont autant de "Moïse" que Dieu s'est choisi, parmi les membres de sa sainte Eglise, pour la libération de la race noire.

La Propagande et le Saint Coeur de Marie

La Propagande a demandé le service des missionnaires du Saint Coeur de Marie pour le salut des populations noires. Libermann présente son Mémoire comme un supérieur rend compte de la gestion qui lui est confiée. Le but premier du Mémoire est de recevoir, de la part de la Propagande, les encouragements, **"la lumière et la force pour accomplir la volonté de Dieu et pour persévérer ...dans la voie difficile de l'apostolat."**¹² Libermann agit, mandaté par la Propagande, pour la gloire du Christ avec la grâce de Dieu. Il voit l'accomplissement de la Mission comme l'oeuvre apostolique, solide et stable, telle que Jésus-Christ l'a instituée.

Libermann reconnaît la Propagande comme son supérieur

¹¹ Ibid., p. 231.

¹² Ibid., p. 228.

hiérarchique. Cependant la Propagande, comme la Société du Saint Coeur de Marie, est sous l'obédience de l'Esprit Saint. Il écrit aux Cardinaux de la Propagande en leur exprimant sa conviction: **"La Sacrée Congrégation ordonnera ce que l'esprit de Dieu, qui l'éclaire, lui inspirera sur tous les points de son Mémoire."**¹³

"Depuis plusieurs siècles des légions d'apôtres envoyés par la mère des églises à la conquête des âmes volent aux extrémités du monde avec ce zèle divin que la grâce de Jésus Christ peut seule communiquer."¹⁴

Libermann vit une ecclésiologie de communion. Il situe la Propagande dans 'la mère des églises'. Elle reçoit de Dieu, Père, Fils et Saint-Esprit, ses inspirations, sa compréhension de l'oeuvre apostolique, son zèle apostolique et sa force pour l'accomplir, tout comme les missionnaires du S.C. de Marie.

Action et patience. Le Temps de Dieu.

L'expérience des premiers missionnaires aide Libermann à préciser sa stratégie missionnaire. Le succès de la Mission auprès des Noirs dépend de ses fondations. Pour Libermann, il est **"nécessaire de commencer la Mission par un plan d'ensemble, et une organisation. L'oeuvre apostolique missionnaire est le commencement de la construction de l'édifice stable d'une église canoniquement établie."**¹⁵

Libermann propose le plan d'une organisation primitive nécessaire à tout service missionnaire. Il écrit: **Il ne nous suffit**

¹³ Ibid., p. 230.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 230.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 269. (Résumé de l'ensemble du Mémoire).

certainement pas d'aller au hasard avec la pensée générale de convertir les infidèles. Il faut nous proposer dès l'origine un résultat plus sérieux, plus positif et plus déterminé....Il faut dès l'origine fixer une sommes de moyens...Il faut un plan déterminé...Il faut une organisation hiérarchique très puissante.

Pour obtenir un résultat stable, il faut une pensée d'avenir président aux projets, et une pensée du temps pour l'exécution des détails qui demande une grande patience et persévérance...Il faut beaucoup de temps donc, il faut s'y prendre dès l'origine. Plutôt on commence, plutôt on arrive aux résultats désirés et si désirables. Jamais on ne commence trop tôt, mais bien souvent trop tard, ou plutôt on ne commencera pas du tout, si l'on réagit pas dans ce but dès le commencement.

Si cette théorie est vraie dans toutes les missions, elle devient pratique dans les nôtres. Dans l'état actuel des choses, toutes les circonstances favorisent l'exécution du plan et de l'organisation que nous proposons humblement à Vos Eminences; si nous attendons encore, ces circonstances disparaîtront, d'autres les remplaceront et la pratique de notre projet pourrait devenir inexécutable. Il faut de la patience et du temps dans l'exécution des moyens; or s'il n'y a pas de plan, une organisation tracée d'avance, il ne peut y avoir de persévérance dans l'emploi de ces moyens...¹⁶

Puis Libermann explicite sa pensée: "***Par exemple nous nous proposons de former un clergé indigène,, nous dirons tous qu'il faut faire son possible pour en avoir un; dans la première ardeur de nos désirs nous y travaillerons avec courage; puis les difficultés surviendront plus grandes peut-***

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 245.

être que l'impatience n'osait le prévoir; et le plus triste découragement sera la suite de cet empressement hâtif sans prévisions, sans règle et sans portée.

D'ailleurs sans plan et sans organisation il n'y a pas d'ordre, et là où il n'y a pas d'ordre, la persévérance est impossible aussi bien que le succès."¹⁷

Libermann plaide la cause de ses missionnaires et voudrait leur éviter les fatigues et les déboires causés par l'absence d'un projet missionnaire, de ses objectifs et de sa stratégie.

Homme à l'écoute de Dieu; homme à l'écoute des hommes. Libermann devient un apôtre. A l'écoute de Dieu, comme Nicodème, Libermann naît d'en haut, (Jn 3, 4-8). Uni au Christ, il entend le cri des hommes réduits à l'esclavage. Recevant le vouloir et l'agir de Dieu, il devient co-fondateur du Saint Coeur de Marie et organisateur du service missionnaire dans l'Eglise. Sa force et sa confiance? Dieu y pourvoit!

P. Jean-Claude Pariat c.s.sp

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00 136 ROMA
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¹⁷ Ibid., p. 245.

IDENTIDADE ESPIRITANA E CULTO MARIAL NO CONTEXTO BRASILEIRO

por Pedro Iwashita

Pedro Iwashita é o Provincial da Província do Brasil. Brasileiro, descendente de japoneses, foi ordenado padre em 1977. Depois de uma experiência pastoral no Brasil continuou seus estudos na Universidade Católica de Friburgo, recebendo o título de doutor em Teologia. De volta ao Brasil, Pedro retornou aos trabalhos pastorais ao mesmo tempo que ensinava no curso de pós-graduação da Faculdade Nossa Senhora Assunção em São Paulo. Nos últimos anos foi o responsável pela casa de Formação do segundo ciclo em São Paulo, antes de ser eleito Provincial.

Nas Origens

Ao falarmos de Maria, lembramos de um aspecto fundamental de nossa identidade espiritana. Desde as nossas origens, Claude Poullart des Places e seus companheiros, fizeram a consagração ao Espírito Santo ao pés da Virgem Negra de Paris, Notre Dame de la Bonne Délivrance (Nossa Senhora do Bom Parto).¹

¹ GOBEIL, Maurice, "LA VIERGE NOIRE DE SAINT-ETIENNE DES GRÈS, NOTRE DAME DE BONNE DÉLIVRANCE", in: **Sources Spiritaines**, disquette nº 1, cod. NDBDELIV, progr. WP5.1.

Segundo o Padre Joseph Michel, Poullart des Places tinha uma forte devoção à Imaculada Conceição,² e pelo menos até 1848 "no seminário do Espírito Santo, no dia de Pentecostes e no dia 8 de Dezembro, os Espiritanos (diretores e estudantes) reunidos diante de uma estátua de Nossa Senhora, se consagravam ao Espírito Santo sob a invocação de Maria concebida sem pecado."³ Quando se fala de identidade espiritana e culto marial, é preciso ter em vista esta presença de Maria no tronco principal da árvore da Congregação. O que diremos a propósito de Libermann, é uma continuação dessa mesma tradição.

Maria na Regra Provisória

O Padre Libermann escrevia ainda na Regra Provisória de 1845: "... é uma consagração toda especial que fazemos de toda a nossa Sociedade, de cada um dos membros, de todos os seus trabalhos e empreendimentos ao Santíssimo Coração de Maria, coração eminentemente apostólico e todo inflamado de desejo pela glória de Deus e a salvação das almas. Nós o consideraremos como um modelo onde devemos ser consumidos e como numa fonte abundante e sempre aberta onde devemos nos abastecer. A ele nós recorremos sem cessar, com a maior confiança, para que ele se digne derramar a ternura maternal que sente por nós e nos obter uma grande abundância de graças para nós e para todos os nossos trabalhos".⁴ Esta consagração ao Coração de Maria, vem depois da consagração a Jesus Cristo.

² MICHEL Joseph, *AUX ORIGINES DE LA CONGRÉGATION DU SAINT-ESPRIT. L'influence de l'AA- Association secrète de piété - sur Claude Poullart des Places*. Paris, 1992, p. 70

³ Ibid., p. 82.

⁴ *Regra Provisória*, Cap. II, Art. III, Paris, 1845

Maria na nossa Regra de Vida

Em seguimento aos nossos fundadores, nossa Regra de Vida, diz: "somos consagrados ao Espírito Santo, autor de toda santidade e inspirador do espírito apostólico. Permanecemos também sob a proteção do Coração Imaculado de Maria cheio desse mesmo Espírito da plenitude da santidade e do apostolado".

Maria, modelo de vida apostólica

Padre Libermann insistia muito sobre o fato de que Maria é nosso modelo de vida interior e apostólica. Em seu Pequeno Tratado da Vida Interior, ele escreve: *Ter sempre os olhos sobre o interior de Jesus e de Maria... - as relações de Jesus, com Maria, sejam interiores, sejam exteriores; as relações de Maria com Jesus; - o estado interior de Maria nas diversas circunstâncias maravilhosas em que se encontrava; a vida de Jesus nela e sua vida em Jesus. Nos formar diante desses dois grandes modelos, segundo a graça e pelos movimentos da graça que se encontra em nós.*⁵

Esta dimensão da vida de Maria em Jesus e da vida de Jesus em Maria era tão importante, que o Padre Libermann colocou no apêndice da Regra Provisória, onde se encontram as Orações Ordinárias dos Missionários, a oração: Oh! Jesus que viveis em Maria, vinde e vivei nos vossos servidores...O texto se encontra em latim: "O Jesu vivens in Maria, veni et vive in famulis tuis, in spiritu sanctitatis tuae, in plenitudine virtutis tuae, in perfectione viarum tuarum, in veritate virtutum tuarum, in communionem mysteriorum tuorum, Dominare omni adversae potestati, in spiritu tuo, ad gloriam Patris. Amen." Oração que todos os espiritanos rezaram ainda durante muito tempo, e

⁵ F. LIBERMANN, *Le petit traité de la vie intérieure*. Présentation et commentaire du P. Alexis Riaud. Paris, 1980, pages 20-21

certamente, existem pessoas que a rezam ainda.⁶

Maria na vida de Libermann

É importante ter consciência dessa presença de Maria na vida de nossos fundadores. No caso particular de Libermann, Maria entrou em sua vida como uma graça de Deus: "Quando a água do batismo correu sobre a minha cabeça de Judeu, naquele instante eu amei Maria, que eu detestava antes".⁷ E a partir daquele momento, ele sentia essa presença de Maria como mãe: que lhe lembrava a sua mãe: "Sede com Maria como uma criança pequena com a sua cara Mãe. Se tem alguma dor, ela vai imediatamente mostrar o ferimento à mãe: ela está menos preocupada com a cura, do que com o desejo de fazer ver o ferimento à sua mãe, a fim de que ela se compadeça dela e que ela lhe faça uma pequena carícia. A mãe a acaricia e lhe cuida a ferida; e a criança, sem se preocupar com a cura, fica contente e tranquila. Sua mãe lhe deu um beijo, disse-lhe uma palavrinha de amor e ela está satisfeita".⁸

Maria faz parte da dinâmica da fé

O que chama a nossa atenção é o fato da presença de Maria no batismo do Padre Libermann. É a demonstração que Maria faz parte da dinâmica de nossa fé, como bem acentuou o decreto *Lumen Gentium* do Vaticano II.⁹ Isso quer dizer que Maria não é um elemento acessório de nossa vida cristã, mas um elemento integrante. Maria está presente no caminho que

⁶ Existe um longo comentário sobre esta oração feita pelo Padre Libermann, no 1º volume das Cartas.

⁷ N.D. I, p.99

⁸ N.D. VIII, p. 206

⁹ *Lumen Gentium*, no 67.

nos conduz ao Cristo e, deste modo, ela exerce um papel importante na evangelização. Com efeito, poder-se-ia dizer que ela foi a primeira a ser evangelizada e também a primeira que se tornou evangelizadora quando revelou o seu filho ao mundo nas bodas de Caná (Jo 2, 1-12).

Maria na minha vida

Eu me lembro que na minha vida, antes de conhecer Jesus Cristo, tinha conhecido Maria através de nossa mãe, de origem japonesa, que não era cristã ainda na ocasião. A família era de tradição budista e xintoísta. Nossa mãe, um dia, em uma viagem de trem, comprou um livrinho, com o título: *Os milagres de Nossa Senhora Aparecida*. Este livrinho nos impressionou muito, a nós crianças. Nossa mãe nos mostrava as imagens do livrinho, que exprimia a bondade e o poder de Nossa Senhora intercedendo na cura dos doentes, no alívio dos acidentados de todo tipo, etc. Essa forte impressão permaneceu oculto em mim durante mais de dez anos.

Um dia, quando já tinha sido batizado, entrando na igreja paroquial de nossa cidade, fiz a experiência da acolhida da Virgem Maria, toda sorridente e com os braços abertos. Evidentemente não se tratava de uma aparição, e sim de uma imagem de Nossa Senhora da Graças. Mas a face humana de Maria, a face humana de Jesus Cristo, era para mim verdadeiro contraste em comparação com os rostos dos deuses que tínhamos visto na infância.

Maria teve um papel importante na minha formação cristã. Antes de entrar no seminário espiritano, eu era membro da Congregação Mariana e da Legião de Maria, no seio das quais, Maria me iniciou na vida apostólica. Esta presença de Maria não diminuía em nada o meu entusiasmo pelo Cristo. Ao contrário, a Virgem dava sabor e sentimento de humanidade.

Maria no catolicismo brasileiro

A presença de Maria na vida da maioria dos católicos brasileiros, é muito importante. Pode-se dizer que o catolicismo brasileiro é um catolicismo popular marial. O culto a Maria começou no Brasil há quase cinco séculos, quando os colonizadores e os missionários portugueses chegaram. A piedade marial brasileira sofreu então a influência da piedade marial portuguesa. É em 1717 que começou na verdade a história de uma forte presença de Maria na vida do povo brasileiro.

O santuário de Aparecida do Norte

O que vemos hoje em Aparecida do Norte, não tem nada a ver com o início humilde e pobre. Hoje, Aparecida do Norte, o lugar onde se encontra o Santuário, é uma cidade importante, situada entre as duas cidades mais populosas e importantes do Brasil: São Paulo e Rio de Janeiro, a cerca de 200 kms de São Paulo. Aparecida recebe hoje milhões de romeiros por ano. O santuário é considerado como o segundo do mundo pelo número de romeiros, e a basílica é tão grande como a basílica de São Pedro em Roma.

Nossa Senhora de Aparecida

A imagem milagrosa, em torno da qual o culto começou, foi encontrada por três pescadores. A crônica diz que, ao anúncio da visita do governador, os pescadores foram ao rio para pescar. Mas, eis que eles não estavam conseguindo pescar nada. E eis então que o mais idoso entre eles, descobriu na sua rede, o corpo de uma estátua da Virgem, sem a cabeça. Na segunda vez que lançou a rede na água, ele encontrou a cabeça da estátua da Virgem. E foi assim que o culto à Virgem de Aparecida teve início.

O culto a Nossa Senhora de Aparecida

No início o culto era privado e doméstico. Construiu-se um

altar para a Virgem, e o povo simples e pobre se reunia à noite para rezar o rosário aos pés da Virgem. Mais tarde, o culto foi assumido pela hierarquia e se tornou oficial. Ele continuou a se desenvolver até os nossos dias. A estátua é simples e um pouco escura. Muitos brasileiros se reconhecem na imagem da Virgem.

A expressão popular do culto

A manifestação da piedade popular no santuário é impressionante. Mas será que este tipo de piedade não seria alienante? Constatase que a despeito de todo trabalho de conscientização para uma vida cristã centrada sobretudo no compromisso que na devoção, o povo cristão continua a ir em romaria para Aparecida. Acontece, às vezes, o povo organiza romarias, de forma espontânea, sem que haja a atuação de um padre. É preciso compreender a piedade do povo na dinâmica da fé. O '*sensus fidelium*' está ativo na fé do povo.

Um novo rosto de Maria

Delineia-se, no entanto, um novo rosto de Maria na América Latina, e especialmente no Brasil. O Documento de Puebla¹⁰ discerniu no *sensus fidelium* um novo aspecto do rosto de Maria, pois "nos últimos anos de forma cada vez mais extensa se está articulando outro tipo de piedade, fortemente centrado sobre o seguimento de Maria. Nas comunidades de base, nos grupos onde a dimensão política da fé se explicita e se exerce, apreciam-se de modo especial os traços denunciadores, proféticos e libertadores de Maria, presentes em seu hino de louvor, o Magnificat. Este aspecto quase não fora tematizado na tradição mariana e pertence também ao feminino. A imagem que a piedade veiculava e a teologia secundava era a da virgem e mãe meiga, doce, piedosa, humilde, totalmente

¹⁰ Puebla, no 844.

voltada a Jesus e à sagrada família."¹¹

A dimensão libertadora de Maria

Paulo VI, atento aos sinais dos tempos e ao *sensus fidelium*, sublinhara na 'Marialis Cultus', a dimensão libertadora de Maria, dizendo que Maria, longe de ter sido uma mulher passiva e submissa, ou de uma religiosidade alienante, foi na verdade uma mulher forte, que não teve medo de dizer que Deus é vingador dos humildes e dos oprimidos, e derruba dos seus tronos os poderosos deste mundo (Lc 1, 51-53). Maria foi uma mulher que conheceu a pobreza e o sofrimento, a fuga e o exílio. Ela não foi uma mulher voltada unicamente para a sua família, mas uma mulher que, pela sua ação, favoreceu a fé da comunidade apostólica em Jesus Cristo. Sua função maternal se dilatou, assumindo dimensões universais no Calvário.¹²

É este rosto de Maria que toma forma na América Latina, o que é um sinal de esperança, não somente para este continente, mas também para o conjunto da Igreja.

Conclusão

Maria é um dom, uma graça personificada de Deus.

Com efeito, Maria é uma graça personificada de Deus, oferta à humanidade: "Jesus viu sua mãe e, ao lado dela, o discípulo que ele amava. Então disse à sua mãe: "Mulher, eis aí o seu filho. "Depois disse ao discípulo: "Eis aí a sua mãe." (Jo 19, 26-27). Contemplando esse acontecimento, em um momento crucial e decisivo do ato redentor de Jesus Cristo, podemos

¹¹ BOFF Leonardo, *O rosto materno de Deus*. Ensaio interdisciplinar sobre o feminino e suas formas religiosas, Vozes, Petrópolis, pp. 196-197

¹² *Marialis cultus*, no 37

imaginar que Jesus tinha diante de si, a visão da humanidade de todos os tempos, desta humanidade sofredora, a qual ele viera salvá-la pela sua morte sacrificial e pela sua ressurreição.

E precisamente naquele momento, a "hora" de Jesus (Jo 2, 4; 17, 1), que ele oferece o que de mais precioso ele tinha nesta terra, a saber, a sua própria mãe, embora ele mesmo tivesse proclamado a primazia do parentesco espiritual em relação ao parentesco de sangue (Mc 3, 31-35). Maria é, com efeito, como vai se mostrar nos séculos a vir, pelas proclamações dogmáticas, um dom miraculoso.

A história do Povo de Deus prova, de uma maneira especial entre os pobres e os humildes, a eficacidade desse dom. Ontem como hoje, Jesus Cristo continua a nos dizer: "Eis tua Mãe", e a Maria: "Eis teu filho". E Maria nos diz: "fazei tudo o que ele vos disser" (Jo 2, 5).

Pedro Iwashita

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BOOKS / LIVRES / LIVROS

Gittins Anthony J., *BREAD FOR THE JOURNEY*. The Mission of Transformation and the Transformation of Mission". New York, Orbis Books, 1993 187 pp.

The central theme of this book is celebrating the Eucharist in life's journey and particularly in one's journey in mission. This may seem to be an overworked theme for writers on mission today. Nevertheless I would recommend Spiritans to reflect on the insights and challenges of this book. Deceptively complicated, it still is, as the author claims, a simple 'readin' book.

There are two central threads running through the work. A word on both, for they are critical to understanding the author's approach to mission.

There is a dualism, what he calls "a binary mode of thinking" which is a threat to the missionary enterprise and to the persuasiveness of the Good News. It is pervasive and subtle, he claims, and confuses the way we think about things and the way

things actually are. "It sees things in black and white, good and bad, up and down. But zebras are black and white; flamingoes are neither; to a person on the twentieth floor, the tenth floor is a long way down while to someone on the ground floor it is a long way up." Deceptively simple - but a real problem is caused by our believing that the way we think is a faithful reflection of the way the world actually is; when we move into other people's worlds in mission the problem can become enormous.

The other central thread is the principle of change and continuity, what he refers to as "transformation", with which every missionary has to contend. The tendency is for the missionary to look for change preeminently in local cultures and peoples rather than in the missionary or in the church. The missionary must be aware that if you apply this principle of 'transformation' to one particular linguistic form it may well change it into another quite different form. It is the underlying deep structures

which at times give meaning to language.

He illustrates this with two examples. While there is universal speech there is no universal language, only particular languages. And while we adapt and respond to the transforming grace of God in the eucharist there is no universal eucharist but only myriad particular eucharists. Some practical consequences follow. If the eucharist is standardised or simplified it will become artificial and superficial. If it becomes esoteric like a dead language, it will become inaccessible to flesh-and-blood people. The eucharist is the paradigm for our communication as Christians with all people everywhere but the paradigm is only imperfectly articulated in any single eucharistic liturgy.

All missionaries need to go through a process of conversion if they apply these two principles to their way of being in mission. This conversion is a continuous process which must be realized in a particular world where the mission actually is. It does not happen in a vacuum but in the missionary's own life where the eucharist and the missionary's

own spirituality encounter each other and become mutually transforming. When we celebrate the eucharist does the celebration serve to reflect, endorse and redeem the actual person we are and the experience we bring to the assembly or does it suppress and deny these?

Gittins examines how some concrete situations in mission can be influenced, changed, transformed by these principles. Having spent a considerable part of my life in a situation of mission in East Africa he confronted me again and again with seemingly simple examples of how my missionary work had been influenced by dualism in thinking and by the awareness or lack of it, of the importance of continuity and change, - and with the need above all for self-conversion.

Two chapters might appear to be extraneous to the main theme of the book but are far from being so. One deals with "mission in reverse", the other with witchcraft. Mission in reverse is now an ambiguous term and is used of such varied situations as to be largely ineffectual. Gittins quotes the original text which described a

way of living out the Christian message in actual situations of mission. It is the hallmark of the 'converted missionary':

"The mission-in-reverse approach teaches that the minister can and should learn from the people ministered to - including, and perhaps specially, from the poor and marginalized people. By taking these people seriously, by listening to them ... personal relationships are developed, and the dignity of the people is enhanced. Such presence to people is seen as necessarily allowing them to be the leaders in the relationship." (p.56).

The chapter on witchcraft, (the full title is "Witchcraft, Eucharist and Hocus Pocus") tells of an experiment in witchfinding experienced personally by the author when he was a missionary with the Mende people of Sierra Leone. The account is followed by a fascinating application of the experience to the theology and practice of the Eucharist.

Gittins deplores the present practice of celebrating the Eucharist. The heart of the missionary undertaking is gathering the community of faith as

the body of Christ to celebrate and be nourished by the Eucharist-"the summit towards which the activity of the Church is dedicated (and) the fount from which all the Church's power flows"-(Vatican II and Mediator Dei). He remarks drily that it is not only cynics who have great misgivings about the current state and status of the eucharist (p.72), but rather than criticising the inapplicability of Vatican II's theology of eucharist to missionary situations (we are all aware of the consecrated hosts being brought by bicycle to remote 'bush' areas) he promotes a dialogue between liturgy and cultures in celebrating eucharist. Eucharistic devotions such as viaticum, processions, Benediction, Forty Hours, Exposition, make evident that eucharist has a significantly wider currency than Mass. Where the formal celebration of Mass is unavailable communities of faith can still learn to become a eucharistic people based on the principle of gift-exchange which is a widely acknowledged feature of peoples' cultures in many mission situations. Gift-ex change is most commonly experienced in variations on the theme of meals or food-sharing.

The social and cultural significance of sharing food can create bridges between culture and cult and suggests the possibility of a variety of inculturated eucharistic forms responding to different pastoral and cultural circumstances.

Gittins reveals a little of his own personal journey in his concluding chapter - Mission on the Margins. He sees the margin as the epicentre of mission. "The poor are not our problem; we are their's", he quotes from an anonymous source. His journey has led him from the witchfinder in West Africa to living in an apartment in the poorer area of Chicago near to Genesis House. Founded and run by the Volunteer Missionary Movement which is largely a community of laity, it is a place of nurturing for women trying to mend lives broken on the wheel of prostitution and associated addictions. He quotes Gustavo Gutierrez: "The breaking of the bread is at once the point of departure and the point of arrival of the Christian community" and adds: "At Genesis House simple people break bread simply and together; some of those gathered around the table have glimpsed eucharistic

possibilities not yet dreamed of by legitimate eucharistic communities" (p.153).

The many parentheses particularly in the opening chapters, are distracting to begin with, seeming to suggest he must leave nothing unsaid but these tangential comments are provocative and enlightening and I got used to them. Chapter headings and sub-headings (at least one of the latter is missing on page 34) are not always helpful.

In his Introduction the author quotes a story his mother told of the time she worked in a library. One day a slightly disoriented and unsteady figure approached the desk. In a stage whisper that must have echoed around the library stacks, he enquired with heavy emphasis in a thick and engaging brogue: "Have ye got any readin' books?" This is a very good "readin' book". It is also a very good 'thinkin' book. Read it and think about it.

The context out of which Tony Gittins operates (he is a professor of theology and mission at the Chicago Theological Institute) is a relatively poor neighbourhood. It is all-important to him; it affects his way

of thinking theologically and ecclesially. The most significant people for him are those with whom he eats and prays and with whom he is engaged in the neighbourhood, often homeless people, abused women and marginalised people. He lives as simply as possible in his circumstances while remaining passionately committed to theological education and mission. "Perhaps the future depends on us not being structured in conventional ways but growing wild in the hedges and the cracks in the pathways. That is where the suffering and the exploited of our cities are. They are in a real way the 'most abandoned' of our time. And unless we are walking with them in some meaningful way, I fear we may be walking past them or even on them. I do little for them, God knows, but living near them and among them, is a constant prick to my conscience, and a reminder that I call myself a Christian".

William Jenkinson

KOREN Henry J., *Spiritans East Africa Memorial, 1863-1993*
Bethel Park, PA, 1994, 707 pp.

The book has just come off the press. It narrates the

story of what the Spiritan mission accomplished there in the form of individual biographies of the 950 Fathers, Brothers and Associates (both the dead and the living) who made their contribution to its achievement.

The first section is dominated by stalwart Alsatian missionaries who sowed in tears; the second section by the vigorous work done by the Irish, Dutch and American Spiritans, who nurtured and watered the seed; the ends with the crowning achievement of a native province in a largely Christianized East Africa, which continues the tradition of our charism and apostolate.

As the biographies are arranged by the date of arrival of each Spiritan in East Africa, the continuity of the story is not broken up much, as would have happened if the sequence of the biographies had been arranged by the date of death or in alphabetical sequence. Fr. Koren compiled the individual entries on the basis of the best available information.

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